**The universal vs. the local:   
Lea Goldberg’s writings for children during the Yishuv period**

“I believe that it’s much better to listen to the silliest poems of kindergarten than to hear the sounds of cannons of the most advanced type”. These words were written by Lea Goldberg in 8.9.1939, a week after the beginning of the Second World War. In the continues of this article called “on the same subject itself (“Al Oto Nose Atsmo”) that was published in Hashomer Hatseer magazine, Goldberg declared that (and I quote) “the poet is the one who, especially in wartime, must not forgot the true values of life”, insisting also that “the poet is not just permitted to write a love poem during the war but it’s his duty, because even when there is a war, the value of love is greater than the value of murder. The poet is the one who, especially in wartime, must not forget the true values of life. His duty is to remind man that he is still a man.” )End quote(.

This humanistic statement was published in a crucial historical time, when even the poets who celebrated the "art for art's sake" ideals, integrated current affairs in their poetic writings. Many of them, including Goldberg’s friends and colleagues, mainly Avraham Shlonsky and Nathan Alterman, attacked her stand point and claimed that in times like these even the most sublime poetry should reflect upon the historical developments that were taking place. This debate was manifested in the writings of these influential cultural figures in the Jewish Yishuv in mandatory Erez Israel. It was mainly manifested in the poets canonical writings for adults but in Goldberg’s case, also in her writings for children.

The field of children literature was central in the endeavor to shape a new Jewish youth according to Zionistic and labor movement values. Davar Leyeladim, the labor movement’s magazine was the central Hebrew children’s magazine of that time. Since her arrival to Israel, in 1935, Goldberg was extremely active in Davar Leyeladim. She published in the magazine dozens of poems, stories, translations, critiques, short essays and even comics strips (together with the illustrator Arie Navon). She also served as the magazine sub-editor, responsible for its literary sections. Throughout the years of her involvement in the magazine, Goldberg's universal humanistic approach towards the role of the poet was evident.

But as the world war continued and threatened to reach Eretz Israel, her texts for children begun to engage with the impending storm that shook the world. Gradually her texts began to include increasing references to the war. Those references were implicit at first but became more and more concrete as the war intensified.

In this talk, I will discuss the unique way Goldberg writings for children embodied the conflict between her insistence to celebrate aesthetic and humanistic ideals and her increasing involvement with historical processes that could not be ignored at some point. I will show how Goldberg's writings for children incorporates both the universal and the local, the aesthetics and the political and the all humanistic with the distinctly Jewish and Zionist.

**Hag Ha’Bikkurim - The Arab Rebellion**

This tendency in Goldberg’s writings was apparent even before the second world war. Her writings during the Arab Rebellion that shook the Jewish settlement of Eretz Israel between 1936-1939, also reflected her unique style. That style stood out among most of Davar Leyeladim's texts that concentrated on the idle of young, brave Jewish youth working and protecting his land.

Goldberg’s poem “Hag Bikkurim” (“The holiday of the first fruits”) was published in Davar Leyeladim on 21.5.36. It is a short poem that was located in the magazine between long, central texts in that week’s issue. Most of the texts evolved around the Arab Rebellion that began a month before, on April 1936, when Jews were attacked in Jaffa. Davar Leyeladim’s approach was to explain the young readers what is happening and promote the leadership's policy - the “Havlaga” (restraint). This policy meant not reacting to the violence but protecting the Jewish settlements and continuing with the Avoda Ivrit (Hebrew Labor) of construction and agricultural work.

On the cover of the issue appeared a poem by S. Shalom named “Beyamenu Ele” (In our days). This poem addressed the current affairs in Eretz Israel at that specific time – a series of arsons that were spreading around the country. These are the first two verses of this poem:

ילדים, הראיתם אש   
 בפרדס ובקמה?   
 יד זדים שם נעלמה   
מציתה עמל כפינו.

הם יציתו – ואנחנו נזרע.   
הם יעקרו -   
ואנחנו נטע!   
 אנחנו נטע את ארצנו!

Children, have you seen fire  
in the orchard and in the standing grain?  
A hidden hand inflames  
the products of our working hands

They will set fire – we will sow  
They will uproot –   
we will root again!  
We will plant our land!

Like other Davar Leyeladim's texts this poem does not call to fight, but to restraint. However, this restraint is tinged with militant colors. It is filled with exclamation marks that represent its firm spirit. The very short lines contribute to this atmosphere and make the poem seem as a sort of rigid declaration. It also creates a clear distinction between the innocent Jews who just want to work the land and the hateful and cruel Arabs that hurt them.

Goldberg poem in this same issue is entirely different. This Davar Leyeladim issue came out near Hag Shavuot (or Hag Bikkurim), a very important holiday in the uprising agricultural oriented Jewish community of Eretz Israel. This is the holiday when you harvest the first fruits, and it was usually celebrated excessively in Davar Leyeladim. But that year, due to the current events, the holiday was pushed to the magazine's back pages, where Goldberg poem was placed.

ברכת אביב על השדות הללו,  
ברכת פריון על אילנות הגן,  
פרי ביכורים אל הגרנות יובלו,  
בזוהר יום, בזוהר שפע רן.

פה רות התכופפה ללקוט הלקט  
ובלבה נשאה תפלה קצרה:  
"תן לקמות, האל, פריחה ושקט,  
ולאדם לב טוב כבכּוּרה!"

Spring grace on these fields,  
fertility grace on the garden trees,  
first fruits will be brought to the granary  
in the brightness of the day, in the brightness of a joyful splendor.

Here Ruth bended to collect the “Leket”  
and in her heart, she bore the shortest prayer:  
“Oh, lord, give these standing grains blossom and quiet,  
and to man, a good heart as it was at first!”

This poem establishes, from its first verse, an optimistic and gentle atmosphere that stand opposed to the other texts in this issue. It constitutes an alternative view point to the militaristic spirit of that time.

The first two lines form a parallelism, a common style in the bible. This form contextualizes the poem within a biblical frame work. But the third line creates a direct link between the scene and the modern Zionistic ideals that the holiday embodies, when the first fruits are bought to the granary and not to the Mikdash (Temple).

This alludes to the transformation of the biblical form of the holiday to its modern Zionistic version. In addition, the content of the parallelism in the beginning of the first verse highlights the connection between the spring and fertility. This associates between nature and femininity in a way that challenges the masculine militaristic agricultural spirit of that time.

The first verse ends with the repetition of the word Zohar (brightness) that relates the daylight with a joyful sight (literally: a singing profusion). This relation enhances the spiritual meaning which the word Zohar in Hebrew contains and colors this verse with a gleam.

The second verse cracks this idle by focusing on Ruth of Moav, the central character of the holiday in its biblical version. Ruth is standing with her bended back while collecting the Leket, what was left for the poor in the field. It seems that the inspiring atmosphere of the first verse becomes in the beginning of the second, a humble and mellow one.

But in the short and silent prayer of Ruth’s that concludes the poem, Goldberg, it seems, proudly declares her opposing stand point to the militaristic Havlaga that was prevalent at that time.

Ruth's prayer is focused on the safety and blossom of the grains and its ending calls men, all men, to reaffirm their beliefs in the best of human nature. Like in her aforementioned article, “On the same subject itself”, Goldberg tries to relate the young readers to all men and women and not just the Jewish ones, and to remind them that we all came from the same place. The prayer and the poem end with an exclamation mark which seems at first foreign to their spirit. But in a second glance one can notice Goldberg's firm humanistic opinion about writing in war times peeking from this short pseudo mellow prayer.

**Gam Hashanah - World War II**

A similar declaration appears in Goldberg’s writings a few years later, two weeks after the beginning of the Second World-War, when the world was on fire. In the first pages of Davar Leyeladim issue that came out on September 13, 1939, near Rosh Hashana, Yitsahak Yatsiv, the editor, explains to the young readers about the situation in the polish front. He also writes that the begging of this year is also a beginning of a war and we should be prepared that it might reach Eretz Israel.

The whole issue was filled with articles and literary texts that endeavored to establish a direct link between the Jewish youth in Eretz Israel and their Jewish brothers and sisters in Europe. This style of writing to children was prevalent at this time, after the war began.

Goldberg's poem in this issue is called “Gam Hashana” (This year too). It’s a very short poem that appeared between long stories – one of Shay Agnon called “Tashlich” in which the protagonist returns to Israel to study Tora and one of Falek Halperin about wondering Jews in Europe which ends in a prayer for Jews where ever they are. Apart from its graphic difference from these stories, Goldberg’s poem is unique in the way it relates to the current events without mentioning them.

כל שנה ושנה מוריק הדשא,

ועולה החמה ויורד המטר.

כל שנה ושנה אדמה מתחדשת

ומלבין החצב, ומזהיב ההדר.

בכל שנה נולדים אנשים לרב,

לדמעות ולצחוק, לאחווה ושנאה,

ויש מישהו הרוצה רק בטוב

גם השנה.

Every year the grass turns green,  
the sun comes out, the rain falls down.  
every year the soil renews  
the squill turns white, the orange brushed gold.  
  
every year people are born,  
to tear, to laugh, to hate and to brotherhood,  
and there is someone who wants only good  
this year too.

In a very simple, even naïve, style, this short poem manages to say something that defies the other concrete and actual texts that surround it.

The first verse circles around the optimistic renewal process of nature. The second verse deals with the wide spectrum of the human experience. The end of this verse can imply to some divine being, a god that will keep us safe. But it can also be interpreted as a vote of confidence in the human spirit. It is a reminder of a required hope and belief in human nature, even in face of misery and existential cruelty.

In addition, the fact that there are only two words in the last line – “Gam Hashanah” (3 words in English – this year too) highlights their importance and gives a concrete meaning to the whole poem. Those words stand opposed to the somewhat naïve atmosphere of the poem and turn it to a firm humanistic declaration, similar to the one at the end of Ruth’s prayer.

Goldberg incorporates in this poem the values of the local Jewish community in Eretz Israel that was preoccupied with nature and agriculture with the concern for the Jews in Europe. But first and foremost, she relates these two with the universal human spirit that started to be forgotten in those hectic days, the sprit that the poet ought to remind us of its existence according to Goldberg.