

THE BIG STORY



THE BACKYARD (2013)

Lyrics by YANKELE ROTTBLIT, music by TOMER YOSEF

BACKGROUND

The Backyard is a multi-generational Israeli super-band. Tomer Yosef is a performer and singer-songwriter in his own right, as well as the lead singer (and occasional brilliant drummer) of internationally-renowned group Balkan Beat Box. Joining him from Balkan Beat Box is Itamar Tzinger on voice and bass, and keyboardist and singer Gedi Ronen who was one of the guys behind the successful indie band, [Devek](#). But what makes their coming together particularly special is their lyricist, Yankele Rotblit. Rotblit is one of Israel's most successful lyricists, having penned a huge number of well-loved Israeli songs over five decades of creativity.

["Shir laShalom - Song to Peace"](#) (1969) has become his most "notorious" of songs, since it was the song that PM Yitzhak Rabin so happily sang at the demonstration where he was assassinated. But the list of hits written for such icons of Israeli music as Arik Einstein and Yehudit Ravitz just trip off the tongue: *Kama tov shebata habayta* - How good you

came home, *Eych hagalgat mistovev* - How the wheel turns; *Ani ro'eh ota baderech lagimnazia* - I see her on the way to the Gimnazia; *Ba'a m'ahava* - Come from Love; *Darkenu* - Our way; *Lakachti et yadech b'yadi* - I took your hand in mine; *Ma iti* - What's with me; and more.

At age 68 Rotblit turned to this gathering of musicians, and together they opened a Headstart project to fund their first album together. They received over 100% of their ask, and are already on to their third album.

This song was on the first album, and takes on Israel's and Rotblit's long history. (Rotblit himself fought in the Six Day War in 1967, losing his leg in the battle for Jerusalem.) Unsurprisingly, the song did not please everyone in the country, and - while a favorite of those who agree with his critique - was not a huge commercial hit.



The big story that begins in the Bible¹
And goes on and on till today
With the people that went into exile and returned
Two thousand years later
To the home between river and sea

The big story with Holocaust and revival
Hungry pioneers redeeming the land
Acre by acre reclaiming the desert
Reclaiming guilt for there was a war²
And countless foes, a state was established
And that's the main thing
Between river and sea³
Between river and sea

Between river and sea the distance is short
Between river and sea green line purple line
Red line in the valley azure seam on the mountain
And concrete wall in shades of grey⁴
And ruined landscape in agony sighs

The conflict's not over the conflict's not solved
Who takes it all who's left bereft
Whose future it is and whose is the past
Where it's forbidden and who is allowed
Between river and sea
Between river and sea

The big story is a wonderful story
From generation to generation it was easily sold
Till it went wrong and self contradicted
Since then it's neck deep in trouble
The persecuted became a cruel persecutor⁵

*Hasipur hagadol shematchil batanach
Ume'az ad hayom hu holech v'nimshach
Im ha'am sheyatza l'galut v'chazar
Alpayim shana yoter m'uchar
Labayit shebeyn hayam lanahar*

*Hasipur hagadol im sho'ah v'tkuma
Chalutzim r'evim go'alim adama
Dunam po dunam sham hafrachat hashmama
Hafrachat ha'ashma ki hayta milchama
V'oyvey eyn mispar m'dina shehukma
V'zeh ha'ikar
Beyn hayam lanahar
Beyn hayam lanahar*

*Beyn hayam lanar hamerchak lo gadol
Beyn hayam lanar kav yarok kav sagol
Kav adom babik'a tefer t'chelet bahar
V'choma shel b'ton b'gavan afarpar
V'hanof heharuss ne'enach m'yusar*

*Hasichsuch lo nigmar hasichsuch lo niftar
Mi lokeyach hakol v'l'mi lo nishar
Shel mi ha'atid v'shel mi ha'avar
Eyfo asur v'l'mi zeh mutar
Beyn hayam lanahar
Beyn hayam lanahar*

*Hasipur hagadol sipur nehedar
L'dor v'od dor et atzmo hu machar
Ad shechal bo shibush et atzmo hu satar
Ume'az b'ferush histabech at tzavar
Hanirdaf na'asah larodef ha'achzar*

הספור הגדול שמתחיל בתנ"ך
ומאז עד היום הוא הולך ונמשך
עם העם שיצא לגלות וחזר
אלפים שנה יותר מאחר
לבית שבין הים לנהר

הספור הגדול עם שואה ותקומה
חלוצים רעבים גואלים אדמה
דונם פה דונם שם הפרכת השממה
הפרכת האשמה כי היתה מלחמה
ואויבים אין מספר מדינה שהוקמה
וקה העקר
בין הים לנהר
בין הים לנהר

בין הים לנהר המרחק לא גדול
בין הים לנהר קו ירוק קו סגול
קו אדם בבקעה תפר תקלת בהר
וחומה של בטון בגנון אפרפר
והנוף ההרוס נאנח מיסר

הטכסוף לא נגמר הטכסוף לא נפתר
מי לוקח הכל ולמי לא נשאר
של מי העתיד ושל מי העבר
איפה אסור ולמי זה מתר
בין הים לנהר
בין הים לנהר

הספור הגדול ספור נהדר
לדור ועוד דור את עצמו הוא מכר
עד שחל בו שבוש את עצמו הוא סתר
ומאז בפרוש הסתבך עד צנאר
הנרדף נעשה לרודף האכזר



Between river and sea the law doesn't reach
The masses that sowed and the wealth they reaped
Violence and corruption and double morality
Rule and honor bought and sold
A man raises hand on a brother a woman a stranger
All is broken into and all is fenced
And all is fortified
Each sector and gender
Between river and sea

The big story got lost
The big story that knows all
From left and from right upside down and straight
That will understand yesterday and tell what's tomorrow
Between river and sea
Between river and sea

And they say it's still early and they say that it's late
And they say it could be and they say it's decided
Waiting for the coming of president or emperor
Messiah, prophet, general or alien
Who knows how to solve the unsolvable
Bring hope again, show that it's possible
To live in peace between river and sea⁶
Between river and sea

The father's two sons the two sons of Abraham
Two peoples ever at each other's throat⁷
Conqueror and conquered both conquered to dust
A land soaked with spilled blood
Between river and sea
Between river and sea

*Beyn hayam lanahar yad hachok kvar tikzar
Hahamon shezara v'hahon shekatzar
Alimut ush'chitut v'kefel musar
Srara v'kavod b'mikach umimkar*

*V'yad ish b'echav b'isha uv'zar
Hakol kvar parutz v'hakol m'gudar
V'hakol m'vutzar
Kol migzar umigdar
Beyn hayam lanahar*

*Halach l'ibud hasipur hagadol
Hasipur hagadol sheyodeya hakol
Miyamin umismol hafuch v'yashar
Sheyavin et etmol v'yagid ma machar
Beyn hayam lanahar
Beyn hayam lanahar*

*V'omrim od mukdam v'omrim m'uchar
V'omrim she'efshar v'omrim shenigzar
M'chakim sheyavo kvar nasi oh keysar
Mashiyach navi matzbi oh chayzar
Sheyodeya liftor et habilti niftar
L'havi shuv tikvah l'har'ot she'efshar
Lichiyot bashalom beyn hayam lanahar
beyn hayam lanahar*

*Shney banav shel ha'av shney b'ney Avraham
Shney amim ochazim zeh et zeh bigronam
V'kovesh v'nichbash nich'bashim ad afar
Adama shesfugah badam hanigar
Beyn hayam lanahar
Beyn hayam lanahar*

בין הים לנהר יד החוק כבר תקצר
ההמון שזרע וההון שקצר
אלימות ושחיתות וכפל מוסר
שררה וכבוד במקח וממכר

ויד איש באחיו באשה ובזר
הכל כבר פרוץ והכל מגדר
והכל מבצר
כל מגזר ומגדר
בין הים לנהר

הלך לאבוד הספור הגדול
הספור הגדול שיודע הכל
מימין ומשמאל הפוך וישר
שניבין את אתמול ויגיד מה מחר
בין הים לנהר
בין הים לנהר

ואומרים עוד מקדם ואומרים מאחר
ואומרים שאפשר ואומרים שנגזר
מחכים שיבוא כבר נשיא או קיסר
משחין נביא מצביא או חיזר
שיודע לפתור את הבלתי נפתר
להביא שוב תקווה להראות שאפשר
לחיות בשלום בין הים לנהר
בין הים לנהר

שני בניו של האב שני בני אברהם
שני עמים אוהבים זה את זה בגרונם
וכובש ונכבש נכבשים עד עפר
אדמה שספוגה בדם הנגר
בין הים לנהר
בין הים לנהר



The big story got lost
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 From left and from right upside down and straight
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 Between river and sea
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• Halach l'ibud hasipur hagadol
 • Hasipur hagadol sheyodeya hakol
 • Miyamin umismol hafuch v'yashar
 • Sheyavin et etmol v'yagid ma machar
 • Beyn hayam lanahar
 • Beyn hayam lanahar

• הלך לאבוד הספור הגדול
 • הספור הגדול שיודע הכל
 • מימין ומשמאל הפוך וישר
 • שובין את אתמול ויגיד מה מחר
 • בין הים לנהר
 • בין הים לנהר

FOOTNOTES

1. "The big story that begins in the Bible"

Some would begin the "big story" of the State of Israel with the destruction of the Temple and the beginning of exile, some refer to Herzl and the Dreyfuss trial, for example.

- Why do you think Rotblit begins with the Bible, and what is the significance of this choice?
- In telling the "big story" of the State of Israel, where would you begin the story?

2. "reclaiming the desert/Reclaiming guilt for there was a war"

"hafrachat hashmama/hafrachat ha'ashma"

Before addressing the content, we should take just a moment to appreciate the masterful use of the Hebrew language here. The sounds of the two Hebrew phrases - hafrachat hashmama/hafrachat ha'ashma - are almost identical, while the first refers to romantic Zionist iconography of making the desert bloom, yet the second talks of harsh military morality. This juxtaposition deserves a round of applause merely for its dexterity!

- What would you say is meant by the line "Reclaiming guilt for there was a war", and why do you think it is such a compact, short sentence?

3. "Between river and sea"

This refers to the area between the Jordan river and the Mediterranean Sea, formerly known as Mandatory Palestine.

- What connotations does this phrase have for you?
- What impact does this phrase have?

4. "a concrete wall in shades of grey" - referring to the concrete barrier constructed in Judea and Samaria/West Bank over the past two decades.

"And ruined landscape in agony sighs"

- Why do you think the song refers to the land and not, for example, the people?





The wall from Aida
refugee camp in
Bethlehem
by Robbie Gringras

5. "The persecuted became a cruel persecutor"
 - This is the line that divides people! Bearing in mind it is clear from all of Rotblit's writing that he is referring to Israel and Jewish Israelis, how does this line meet with your gut?
6. And they say it's still early and they say that it's late
And they say it could be and they say it's decided
Waiting for the coming of president or emperor
Messiah, prophet, general or alien
Who knows how to solve the unsolvable

Bring hope again, show that it's possible
To live in peace between river and sea
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- Do you find this verse optimistic or pessimistic?
7. "Two peoples ever at each other's throat"
It's worth looking at the cartoon drawn by Shay Charka, a settler living in Samaria/West Bank. He was asked how he might sum up the relationship between Jews and Palestinians, and he replied with a cat-and-mouse drawing...
<https://youtu.be/nTgQXeqZ-IU>
 - What arises for you when you hear the line in the song, and see Charka's drawing?

THEMES

- # **Israeli-Palestinian conflict**
- # **Jewish-Arab conflict**
- # **Idealism**
- # **Zionism**
- # **Hope and despair**
- # **Guilt**
- # **Anger**
- # **Disillusionment**