From *Conversations with Survivors*, 1994:

**Ponar**

In the world to come, the forests won’t have secrets. Leaves will fall on soil made of leaves, Stems, mud, grass, the usual substances And everything that happens will be heard for miles: Leaves rattling, trees falling, gunshots. Only there will be no gunshots. We are talking about the world to come.

And the people of Ponar will brush off the dirt And return to the twenty-seven libraries And sixty study halls of the Vilna synagogue To run the gamut in their youth organizations From right-wing Zionism to left-wing Zionism And mimeograph avant-garde poetic tracts On the beauty of the aspens at Ponar.

Mostly, they’ll learn Mishnah and Gemara At the oversubscribed lectures of Rabbi Akivah, Who, though he was slaughtered like a beast In the marketplace, according to the Midrash, Was not hindered in the world to come From astounding even Moses with his insights.

Not just the rabbis and the rich will study, But butchers, tailors, shoemakers, musicians; The air itself, weighted down with ash, Will rifle through the aspens’ skittish pages For commentaries on the sacred texts Derived from half-revealed illuminations Lost before they could be copied down

Along with murals, stories, recipes, Chemical formulas, dress patterns, Melodramas, new prime numbers, poems Crowded together in the rare, dark soil That polishes the aspens’ tarnished silver To prepare a setting for the alef-bet

Or perhaps to make each leaf a tiny mirror To shine, in miniature, an unclaimed face
Dreaming calmly of the world to come
Until it fills with gold and falls again –
This time gently – to its waiting place
And rests its secrets on the cluttered earth
Shaded by the forest at Ponar.