



# Sloan-Kettering: Poems

*Abba Kovner*

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# Sloan-Kettering: Poems

*Abba Kovner*

## **Sloan-Kettering: Poems** Abba Kovner

In this luminous collection of poems, Abba Kovner records his deep engagement with life during his last days, as he lay dying of cancer in Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center. Kovner, the famed Jewish resistance fighter who led the Vilna ghetto uprising during World War II, was also a beloved master of Hebrew literature, and his work has seldom appeared in English. This translation brings us the fierce and humble gratitude of a visionary who has been a fighter not just for himself but for a whole people, as Kovner takes up his pen to say goodbye to a precious, if flawed, world.

Weaving together his perceptions of the present moment (“How little we need/to be happy: a half kilo increase in weight,/two circuits of the corridors”); his sorrow at leaving the world (his wife knitting at his bedside, the chatter of his grandsons); the dramatic loss of his vocal cords (“Have I no right to die/while still alive?”); and memories of his heroic comrades in the Baltic forest, Kovner emerges from these pages with yet another kind of heroism. His continual movement toward freedom and his desire to give a complete account of the gift of life, even as that life is failing, make his words stirring and unforgettable.

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