

from my "Hospital Patients"
Yisroel Shtern (1924)
Translated by Jon Levitow (2007)

We drift off in white blankets
like streets covered with snow...

We're the stones of the world,
our soft beds hard.

The days squeeze our bodies,
running past us
as wheels roll over stones:
Once they rumbled -- now they're far away,
and what remains? Sharp-cut signs,
signs, signs, signs on pits.

We lie, we look, and read with difficulty
The deep language of our wounds.

We don't move, lying unknown like roads.
The days run harshly over us like wheels.

Once in a while, though, everything is silence, threat, and darkness --
as a dark cloud looks down silently on earth,
and on us falls a sadness that's so thick,
such a soft sadness, wrapping up our dry bodies
like the winter wraps up
streets in snow, the streets in snow...

And everything's forgotten, it no longer hurts...

But late at night a wind sometimes will give a sigh,
it becomes so cold, and the loneliness cries:
 winter...

We press the white blankets to our hearts,
afraid of them,
and dream through them a prayer...

God, God, please send springtime
to these harsh, human roads.