

# A Poem for S.

By [Jessica Greenbaum](#)

Because you used to leaf through the dictionary,  
Casually, as someone might in a barber shop, and  
Devotedly, as someone might in a sanctuary,  
Each letter would still have your attention if not  
For the responsibilities life has tightly fit, like  
Gears around the cog of you, like so many petals  
Hinged on a daisy. That's why I'll just use your  
Initial. Do you know that in one treasured story, a  
Jewish ancestor, horseback in the woods at Yom  
Kippur, and stranded without a prayer book,  
Looked into the darkness and realized he had  
Merely to name the alphabet to ask forgiveness—  
No congregation of figures needed, he could speak  
One letter at a time because all of creation  
Proceeded from those. He fed his horse, and then  
Quietly, because it was from his heart, he  
Recited them slowly, from *aleph* to *tav*. Within those  
Sounds, all others were born, all manner of  
Trials, actions, emotions, everything needed to  
Understand who he was, had been, how flaws  
Venerate the human being, how aspirations return  
Without spite. Now for you, may your wife's  
X-ray return with good news, may we raise our  
Zarfs to both your names in the Great Book of Life.