

Shiva

Akiva J. Savett

Separate yourselves from the midst of the congregation. — NUMBERS 16:21

*How long should I bear with this evil congregation which murmur
against me?* — NUMBERS 14:27

Overdressed on their silver tray —
jovial but insincere,
these grey shiva cookies —
here to resurrect
the memory of previous cookies.
We gather,
ten strangers to each other,
and some, like me,
even to the deceased.

The only evidence of his residency —
pictures with his widow,
who now sits in a low chair,
facing the window:
the inexorable expectation of return.
We are here so she can
say the Mourner's Kaddish,
the essential prayer for the deceased.

It's a statement:

God is just, all powerful, all knowing,
he created the world, he is its master.

The ten are required to support the mourner,
belief via volume.

All of us, after saying the first lines in unison,
murmur the rest.

This is custom, not lack of knowledge.

Best not to speak untruth loudly.

This mysterious culting,
orderly to us in the fold,

who stand so close to the unopened
bottles of Pepsi

and the obligatory pastries.

We are obliged to mumble what can't be yelled.

She wonders when we finally leave:

why did we get a bathroom with double sinks?

Mine, now merely a basin for spit,

his, deep as a fresh grave.



AKIVA J. SAVETT's poetry has appeared in Poetry Quarterly, Circa, The Red River Review, In Parentheses, The Eunoia Review, Etcetera, Caesura, and was published in The Washington Post's "Autobiography as Haiku." He teaches English and Advanced Placement Literature at Winston Churchill High School in Potomac, Maryland, and lives in suburban Maryland with his wife Alison and two children.