

A SONNET FOR MICHAEL

Benson Scotch

Jewish tradition tells us that at all times there are thirty-six righteous people in the world, whose identity is unknown to each other and whose role in life is to justify the purpose of mankind in the eyes of God; and that were it not for them, all of them, if even one of them were missing, the world would come to an end. The two Hebrew letters for thirty-six are the lamed, which is thirty, and the vav, which is six. Thus, each of the thirty-six is called a Lamed Vavnik.

Death row's not quite empty yet, though bowed.
Its wardens shudder still to hear your name
Or see the throng who keep alive the flame.
Your work well done, well taught, Death be not proud.
Now just waking somewhere on this sphere
Another unbeknownst makes thirty-six.
Maybe coffee first, then out to fix
Injustice not quite humbled. Michael's near—
His footfall stirs the Court. Another fight?
We've been assured that Paradise is fair.
No brief is ever due, but Michael's care
Is boundless—Heaven has no special rights.

A Lamed-Vavnik? Who on Earth can say?
But Justice smiles: Michael passed our way.