

**In the time of the black rain**

**by Yisroel Shtern (1920)**

Translated by Miriam Leberstein (2006)

*"The clouds draw water from the depths" (Pardes A)*

*"The clouds cover the well" (Zohar)*

Like the waves of the ocean, the days clamor by,  
over streets and people and big cities  
and foam up, uneasy and wild,  
bringing with them destruction.

When our young, exhausted life  
plunges down and guzzles up  
their rough, salty rumble  
thick clouds gather  
on the shining surface of our soul.

Terrified, we retreat  
into the farthest corner of our being;  
we're afraid of every sound and movement,  
like someone who lies, alone and half-awake  
on a starless, late-winter night  
and sick with fear sees:  
his dead little brothers  
have come to him  
and are pulling him to them  
by his toes...  
Our bewildered gazes  
are drawn to the windows,  
but dawn is still so far away...  
while pacing above our heads--  
aged and grizzled by the weight of an arduous dream--  
comes cloud after cloud:  
and our eyes are raining a thin, autumnal rain,  
our eyes are raining.

Throughout the wet, lamenting nights  
can be heard over streets and people and big cities  
as far as a hoarse cry can carry:

"You have known us since our age began —

a wise, devoted witness to frail humankind.  
you know our places – wild ways in a wild wood --  
and you have sworn  
by the sanctity of your mercy  
not to permit the downfall  
of our small world.  
See how our old trees have been uprooted by the storm.  
We, the young, desperately beat our heads like grass against the ground.  
Children are frightened by the rain falling  
in the darkness, and weep.  
Just look at the grief  
of their pallid mothers, who must smile  
and comfort them without conviction:  
'He is good... he will forgive us...'  
and do not dare to lift  
their sickly brows to the horizon.  
How long will you make us wait  
for your great blue-red rainbow  
on high?"

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