

He Makes His Demands

By Yisroel Shtern

Translated by Zackary Sholem Berger (2006)

Levi Yitskhok of Berdichev

kept on arguing

late into the night.

What do you want of your blind children
(a blind child is a child too)
who see their loneliness
can't see their Father
bemoan their lives
can't find the way?

Where does a person go at night?
To you.
And what if he got terribly lost
and straggled palely home
who makes him ashamed?
Just you.
Hot blood boiling?
To you.
Fast tears flowing?
To you.

And you –
wrapped up in seven layers of blue
at the most beautiful end of the last heaven
you're stubbornly sitting there
waiting – for what?
Can't you see all the cities mourning at night?
Can't you hear the sinners cursing their night?
Can't you feel every stone
feverishly straining from the pavement
up, up to you?

And you –
are silent!
Who could you want to prevail against,
Mighty, mighty God?
Why are you teasing your sick children?
You must be suffering more than they are.

Your eternity is no good to you:
if a person moans
you stop up your ears
with thick pieces of cloud
and you can't hear the stars singing . . .
It's worse for you, great God,
and still you won't give in?
Then Levi Yitskhok of Berditchev
will bring suit against you
by your own law:

If a Jew's tefillin fall to the ground
he'll pick them up and kiss them.
Your children have fallen.
Wise Father, you know why.
The path was uphill.
The path was a hill up-to-you.
A long stretch, hot and up high;
quite a distance, high up there and hot,
forests lead to the mountain,
trees ignite.
A spark sprays into someone's eye
and he falls down blind.

Here's how a simple Jew acts:
If holy things fall down
He raises them with a kiss.
What are you waiting for?
Why are you so stubborn?
You must be suffering more than they are!

*And Levi Yitskhok of Berditchev
stands and puts his case
night after night.*