

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?"

* * * * *