

Loving and Beloved
Tales of Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev,
Defender of Israel



Simcha Raz

LOVING AND BELOVED

**Tales of Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev,
Defender of Israel**

TRANSLATED BY
Dov Peretz Elkins

Maggid Books

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In loving memory of

Rabbi Aaron Landes, ר"ל

*scholar, teacher, rabbi, admiral, husband,
father, grandfather, and friend*

Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?

Who may stand in His holy place?

He who has clean hands and a pure heart...

He shall receive a blessing from the Lord.

(Ps. 24:3-5)

Dedicated by

his student Rabbi Dov Peretz Elkins

and his son Joshua Landes

Contents

<i>Translator's Preface</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Between Man and God</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Between Man and His Fellow Man</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>The Coming of the Messiah</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Faith and Trust</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>The Jewish People</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Joy and Sadness</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Loving-Kindness</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Mitzva</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>Moral Qualities</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Parents and Children</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Passover</i>	<i>65</i>
<i>Prayer</i>	<i>71</i>
<i>Purim</i>	<i>83</i>

<i>Rabbi and Leader</i>	85
<i>Rosh HaShana</i>	91
<i>Serving God</i>	105
<i>Shabbat</i>	109
<i>Sin and Transgression</i>	115
<i>Soul and Spirit</i>	121
<i>Spirituality and Materiality</i>	127
<i>Sukkot</i>	129
<i>Teshuva</i>	135
<i>This World and the Next World</i>	139
<i>Tisha B'Av</i>	165
<i>Torah</i>	169
<i>Treat Them Leniently</i>	173
<i>Tzaddik</i>	179
<i>Tzedaka</i>	183
<i>Yom Kippur</i>	193

Translator's Preface

I am delighted and honored to have a part in bringing this book to the English-reading world.

First, because of my deep respect and admiration for my friend and teacher, Simcha Raz, a distinguished Israeli scholar and writer. This is the fifth book, originally written in Hebrew by Simcha Raz, that I have been privileged to publish in English. All five books are the product of Simcha Raz's lifelong study of the sacred literature of the Jewish people.

Simcha Raz has the unique ability to gather profound teachings from many places and imbue the sweetness and beauty of Jewish wisdom into a series of outstanding collections on many themes.

I particularly enjoyed translating this collection of tales of Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev. The stories reflect the powerful ideology of one of the best-known hasidic masters, and the deep moral and spiritual heritage which he has bequeathed to future generations. Rabbi Levi Yitzhak's profound love of the Jewish people, his devotion to his Creator, and his powerful defense of all Jews – all of which earned him the title “Defender of Israel” – make him a model for the Jewish people of this century.

Loving and Beloved

I want to thank those who assisted in making this translation smooth and accurate: Sahar Tzur, Yocheved Klausner, and my son Jonathan Elkins.

I am extremely grateful to my cherished friend, Joshua Landes, who encouraged and supported the publication of this special collection. Most appropriately this book is dedicated to the memory of his beloved and distinguished father, Rabbi Aaron Landes *z"l*.

I am also very grateful to Matthew Miller and the many people at Maggid Books who have shepherded this book to completion, especially editor in chief Gila Fine. Thanks to the gifted staff at Maggid: Tomi Mager, Shira Koppel, Nechama Unterman, and Mia Hamburger. May the efforts of all these talented and industrious people help bring inspiration and enlightenment to all who are privileged to be influenced by the special stories of Rabbi Levi Yitzhak.

In closing, I want to thank my devoted wife, Maxine (Miryam), who tolerated my obsession with the computer during our first year after making *aliya*. Editing and translating this amazing book has brought me great joy and renewed appreciation of the Jewish tradition to which we have together devoted our lives.

Rabbi Dov Peretz Elkins
Rosh Hodesh Elul, 5776

Introduction

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev was born in 1740 in the village of Hosakov, Galicia (Poland). His father was Rabbi Meir, a descendant of a line of esteemed rabbis. At age twelve, he went to study Torah in a yeshiva in the city of Yaroslav. At age seventeen, he married the daughter of philanthropist Yisrael Peretz, a wealthy Jew of the city of Lebartov, who excelled in love of Torah and supported many poor young scholars.

The city of Lebartov was known as “Little Jerusalem,” because of the many students living there. Rabbi Levi Yitzhak lived in Lebartov for several years studying Torah, and became a beloved friend of several great teachers. He grew close to Rabbi Shmelke Horowitz of Nikolsburg, and was a student of Rabbi Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezritch, with whom he studied a great deal of Torah and Hasidism. He often visited the Maggid of Mezritch together with Rabbi Shmelke.

When Rabbi Shmelke was called to serve as rabbi of Nikolsburg, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak took his place as rabbi of the nearby town of Ritchvol. Unfortunately, the *Mitnagdim* in the city pursued him relentlessly, causing him great anguish, such that one year on

Loving and Beloved

Hoshana Rabba he was forced to flee the city. He marched on foot, etrog and lulav in hand, to the Maggid of Kozhnitz.

In 1765, he became rabbi of Zhilokov in the Polish district of Siedlce. Here too the *Mitnagdim* embittered his life. In 1771, he was appointed rabbi in Pinsk, Byelorussia. Again, when Rabbi Levi Yitzhak was visiting his master in Mezritch, the *Mitnagdim* attacked his home and destroyed all his household possessions, and even replaced him with an alternate spiritual leader.

From then on, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak became a wanderer, from city to city, in poverty and hardship. As a result of the harassment of the *Mitnagdim*, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak suffered a nervous breakdown. Fortunately, he quickly recovered. At the age of forty-five, he finally found tranquility when he was elected, with much honor, to serve as *Mara DeAtra* (chief rabbi) of Berdichev, a major Jewish center in the Ukraine.

The community in Berdichev was one of the largest in Czarist Russia, and an important center of the hasidic movement. Rabbi Levi Yitzhak served there as rabbi until the end of his days – almost a quarter of a century.

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak found peace in this stronghold of Hasidism. There he began to spread his powerful spiritual light far and wide, and his inspiring influence continued to grow. Under his tutelage, Berdichev became a fortress of Hasidism and a beacon to a multitude of Jewish followers who came to bask in the glow of Rabbi Levi Yitzhak and listen attentively to his prayers and melodies.

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak was an accomplished scholar, and thousands of students flocked to his *beit midrash*, where they studied Torah and Hasidism with him. On Shabbat days he would teach the congregation, and even on weekdays he would often go out to the marketplace, gather large assemblies of listeners, and encourage them to follow the path of Torah and piety.

His home was open to all those who suffered poverty and desolation. His heart was full of compassion, as reflected even in his family name, *Derbaremdiker*, which means “the compassionate one.” Rabbi Levi Yitzhak was beloved by his people, and many beautiful legends became associated with him.

As a longtime student of the great Maggid of Mezritch, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak would assiduously record in his notebook many of the innovative interpretations of the Torah taught by his rebbe. He is known for his major contribution in collecting and disseminating his teacher’s creative work.

In addition to spreading knowledge of Torah and Hasidism, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak was deeply involved on a regular basis with the needs of the community. He would journey through cities and towns to collect funds for redeeming captives, bridal dowries, and feeding the poor.

For over two decades, he occupied the rabbinical seat of Berdichev. On the twenty-fifth day of the month of Tishrei, 1809, he was called to the heavenly court.

Rabbi Nahman of Breslov called him, during his life, “the Glory of Israel.” When Rabbi Levi Yitzhak died, Rabbi Nahman said, “Whoever has open eyes can see that the light of the universe has been extinguished, and the world has become dark.” The Seer of Lublin eulogized, “Every day I set aside an hour to thank God for sending to the world an exalted, holy soul such as Rabbi Levi Yitzhak.”

After Rabbi Levi Yitzhak’s death, the town never crowned another rabbi to take his place, instead relying on *dayanim*, rabbinical arbiters, for guidance.



Many rabbis exhibited the virtues of Rabbi Levi Yitzhak, such as piety, love of Israel, advocacy for the Jewish people, and

Loving and Beloved

recognition of the uniqueness of the Jewish soul. However, it was only Rabbi Levi Yitzhak who rose to the high level of *melitz yosher*, a living example of a devoted and compassionate Jew who pleaded before the Master of the universe, compelling Him, as it were, to forgive and excuse the sins of the Israel. It was only Rabbi Levi Yitzhak who enumerated in full all the excellent qualities of the Jewish people, sang their praises, and chanted unceasingly the liturgical phrase, “Who is like Your people Israel?”

Furthermore, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak would notice the sinners of Israel, find their treasured qualities, and discover reasons to praise every fault and failure found in them. As Eliezer Steinman, one of the great writers on Hasidism, put it:

Love of Israel was, for this righteous man, not an attribute acquired through the conquering of hatred, the acquiring of knowledge, a rational decision, or force of habit; rather, it was an inborn quality, an essence of goodwill, a burning bush of kindness. Even the words of advocacy with which he defended the People of Israel, and every Jew, were not in the realm of intellect or abstract reflection, but rather products of his soul, his secret dialogue with his Maker.

There is a great deal of hyperbole in hasidic storytelling, and more than a little overstatement when tzaddikim praise one another. There was frequent disagreement among the scholars about the various tzaddikim. But regarding Rabbi Levi Yitzhak, there was no disagreement; he was unanimously crowned as one who loved his people and advocated for them with the very essence of his soul.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi said of him: “The Almighty is a tzaddik above, and Rabbi Levi Yitzhak is a tzaddik below.” Rabbi Barukh of Mezhibush, grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, said of him that the Seraphim (fiery angels) in heaven are jealous of his love

of God and of his piety toward God. Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotzk, who was extremely sparing with praise, stated that “Rabbi Levi Yitzhak opened the Sanctuary of Love in the heavens.” And Rabbi Nahman of Breslov eulogized him with this lament: “We have lost our true master, the head of Israel.” Though in truth, he was the heart of Israel.

When it came to wisdom of the heart, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak was second to none. In the words of Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotzk, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak showed the way of love and devotion. It might be more precise to say that he did not show the way – he himself was the way. He did not offer comfort, but was a comfort in his very being. In the darkness of Jewish life in exile, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak was a shining light. He was not a tzaddik who performed miracles; he himself was a miracle, a living testimony to the power of faith sustaining our nation.

Even though Rabbi Levi Yitzhak was a person of calm temperament and a lover of peace, he was not spared controversy and did not live a life of tranquility. Yet after his death, he became the people’s cherished example of one who is loving and beloved; beloved by God, beloved by man, respected by the hasidic community, and honored by all, even those far from hasidic life.

More than this, he succeeded in raising the prestige of the Hasidism of his day, and with his melodies gladdened hearts throughout the Diaspora. He was graceful and benevolent, and yet in his lifetime he was not successful in all things. He was, according to all the evidence, sickly, feeble in every way, prone to weakness and accidents. In his desire to bless his lulav and etrog, he put his hand through the glass door of the cabinet in which they were lodged, cutting it quite badly. He so loved the burning lights of *Ḥanukka* that he once grabbed the burning wick, singeing his fingers. When he drew water with which to knead the dough for matza, he was so excited, he almost fell into

Loving and Beloved

the well. Rabbi Levi Yitzhak was never at peace, forever eager to fulfill the mitzvot. At the end of every festival he could not sleep, since his arm longed for his tefillin; he would sit at the window awaiting the light of dawn.

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak's soul knew no rest; and if there is no rest, how can there be joy? It is a great irony that this righteous man, who serves to this day as a source of joy and wellspring of encouragement to weary souls, led a life of such pain; he who was constantly bringing pleasure to his Creator and satisfaction to others knew so little of it himself. Rather, he was afflicted by a certain mental illness, which his biographers only hint; and for a whole year this great sage was in deep distress.

In suffering in silence, in being offended but never offending, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak carried much pain in his soul. His was not the lot of pleasantness. He poured out his soul in prayer, in cries, in excitement, in song, and in complaints to the Master of the universe. He pleaded in humility with all those who opposed him, and spoke to them with sweetness and kindness. Yet many requited his kindness with malice.

But there is no use in complaining about past events and directing accusations against those long gone. We learn from Rabbi Levi Yitzhak that advocacy is better than accusations. Nothing useful comes from old resentments. There are many who drank, and who still drink, from the cup of ingratitude. In fact, we are not the first to wonder about the lot of Rabbi Levi Yitzhak. Rabbi Elimelekh of Lizhensk was asked, "May our master teach us: Rabbi Levi Yitzhak, the lover of Israel, why did he have so many enemies?" He answered, "This is nothing new! It's the same old story. Avraham Avinu, may he rest in peace, also had many enemies who insulted him, and Nimrod and his cohorts cast him into a fiery oven. A fiery oven is the inheritance of passionate people."

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak eschewed spiritual arrogance, the high-handedness that often comes with authority. He threw his lot in with the masses, identifying heart and soul with his fellow Jews. His dearest wish was to resemble the simple Jew; to wear his clothes and eat his food, to bear his burdens, to seem in every way to be one of the simple folk. He immersed himself within the people, eradicating every real or imaginary barrier between the average Jew and the great rabbi, between the crowd and its spiritual leaders. For him, this was the true definition of Hasidism: Who is a Hasid? One who sees himself as part of the congregation and is brother and friend to everyman.

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak's philosophy was that all Jews are holy, that all are outstanding people, all righteous, pious, and all wise. And since he was always in a state of burning enthusiasm, he felt that all Jews had similar zeal. He may have cast off his rabbinic trappings, but he could not remove the fiery cloak of passion which he always wore. He thus enlarged the sense of wonder and awe, of honor and piety surrounding him.

It is well known: "Who are the kings? The rabbis." The great Torah scholars were mindful not to sully their kingly image, and took care that there was no stain on their clothes. They even permitted themselves a very small amount of pride and demanded honor for the Torah.

And then came along a rabbi, a giant in Torah and one of the great scholars in Halakha, whose demeanor was one of complete humility, who surrounded himself with simple Jews, bore their burden, carried their heavy loads in the marketplace, dragged bundles of wood on his back to kindle ovens, mixed with the masses, and never promoted his own reputation, preached to others, or admonished them. Quite the opposite, he searched for merit in every simple, ordinary person – even sinners – and served as advocate for all.

Loving and Beloved

They gazed at him in amazement. They could not understand the nature of this Rabbi Levi Yitzhak. He was no normal rabbi; he was peculiar, and did not behave the way rabbis are expected to behave. Was he not a great rabbi, an exceptional scholar? Did he not demand honor for the Torah?

But Rabbi Levi Yitzhak was indeed a great scholar, and there is no doubt that his way of life and general demeanor met the highest standards of Torah. Every discussion, every motion of his was imbued with Torah values, as befitted descendants of the great sages of the Jewish people, whose every conversation was itself a complete philosophy.

He would pray for the prosperity of the House of Israel every minute, and demand of the Blessed Holy One that He be kind and munificent to His people Israel, and offer them abundance – especially material blessings – and that the world would be filled only with goodness. The goal of all his requests for the termination of the exile was that the People of Israel would return to the Land of Israel, which is the source of all goodness, since the Creator has great joy when Israel is filled with goodness and blessings.



Our image of Rabbi Levi Yitzhak is of one who is forever present on the *bima*, draped in his tallit and tefillin, presenting his arguments to the Blessed Holy One along with his pleas for the holy People of Israel. Rabbi Levi Yitzhak was forever toiling for the common person, laboring for the community and with the community.

Unfortunately, we do not find any written record of even a minor reference to the events that occurred in his life. From this point of view, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak was especially neglected,

compared to his colleagues, who had many faithful and admiring students, eloquent writers, who took great pains to lavish on their accomplished masters multitudinous references in pamphlets and booklets, going to great lengths to praise their teachers' accomplishments.

Whatever we do know about the life of Rabbi Levi Yitzhak is in the realm of hearsay, passed down from one generation to the next, not without confusion – myth piled upon myth. Over the course of the years, therefore, after his death (even two or three generations after his passing), Rabbi Levi Yitzhak became a legend. He became a celebrated (if highly embellished) hero. Multitudes crowned him with garlands of folklore, fanciful stories, of which I have assembled, edited, and included in this book only a small percentage. About these the sages wrote, “The tales of the righteous are greater than the creation of heaven and earth” (Ketubot 5a). Not in vain did Rabbi Nahman of Breslov write, “Through the tales of the righteous, the light of the Messiah continues in this world and wards off much trouble and darkness from the world” (*Book of Middot*).

Many rebbes excelled in their love of Israel. Only Rabbi Levi Yitzhak was lifted to the loftiest heights by our people as a shining example of their advocate.

Generations of Jews forgot how some of their folk defamed Rabbi Levi Yitzhak, and remembered only the blessings he said about his people, the praise and honor he heaped upon the scattered flock of Israel. They expunged the insults that were thrust upon him while he walked the earth, and chose to recall, out of deep honor, only the outstanding accomplishments and inspiring melodies he left behind. Rabbi Levi Yitzhak's reputation did not advance in his life, but his image grew greatly as it was passed on to the following generations. Leading rabbis thought that the mention of the name of Rabbi Levi Yitzhak was a cure for illness,

Loving and Beloved

and we believe that the mention of his name has special merit for the health of the soul. Thus we say that Rabbi Levi Yitzhak is an eternal light for the soul.

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak did not have a large group of Hasidim, nor did he nurture many disciples. His personality and his nature were not those of a rabbi, but of a burning torch. A torch does not produce followers, nor can the chapters of its life be recorded. A torch is held high, passed from one generation to the next. It burns eternally. Such is Rabbi Levi Yitzhak, a torch passed down the hands of time, and each generation praises his deeds.



It is my prayer to our Heavenly Father that my humble offering, *Loving and Beloved*, will be accepted by a wide community of readers, and will confirm the ethical principles of love of humanity, of being loving and beloved, as the Baal Shem Tov taught, “If you want to be loved – love others.” In this way, we will come closer to our Heavenly Creator, and perfect the world under the sovereignty of the Almighty.

May it be God’s will!

Simcha Raz

10th of Tevet, 5768

(yahrzeit of my mother, my teacher, Hannah-Malkah
Rakover – née Mandelbaum – of blessed memory)

Between Man and God

A Sign from Heaven

A certain Jew came to Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev with this request: “Would the honored rabbi assist in a *din Torah* that I have with the Master of the universe?”

Immediately, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak convened his *beit din*.

The Jew argued thus: “I am a pauper, I have no possessions, and am obligated by the Torah to marry off my grown daughter. Is it not right that the Blessed Holy One provide me with the provisions for the wedding?”

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak ruled, with the consent of the other judges, that the complainant was justified in his request. He even gave him this verdict in writing.

The Jew was overjoyed, and set out for home with the verdict in hand. Suddenly, a strong wind swept in and blew away the paper with the verdict. The Jew ran after the paper, which flew into the lap of a gentile duke who was sitting in his carriage at the crossroads.

The Jew pleaded with the duke to return the paper. The duke, however, was curious to know what was written on this document

Loving and Beloved

which the wind had blown straight to him. The Jew was embarrassed to tell the duke, so the duke called upon a Jewish translator, asking him to copy the verdict into Polish.

The duke was pleased with what he heard. Even more so, he saw the fact that the document had blown specifically into his lap as a sign from above that he was meant to be the good emissary who would help the Jew with the provisions for the wedding.

And so he did.



Who Is Liable?

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev listened carefully to a preacher who stood and rebuked the crowd of Jews for their sins.

After the speaker completed his sermon, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak said to him: “Why did you deliver only half of your sermon? Return to the *bima* and deliver the other half. You reproved the Jews because of their sins; now it is only fair that you reprove their Father in heaven, who oppresses them in exile, torments them harshly, and allows evil enemies to torture and abuse them.”



“They’re Watching!”

It happened once that Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev was traveling in a wagon. Suddenly, the wagon driver noticed a pile of hay lying at the side of the road, and no one was around. The driver descended from the wagon, intending to steal the hay. Rabbi Levi Yitzhak cried out:

“They’re watching, they’re watching!”

The wagon driver looked all around, and asked in surprise, “Who?”

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak replied, “The Blessed Holy One!”



There Is a God in the World

It was reported to Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev:

“The spirit of the *Haskala* is spreading in our region, and with it apostasy and irresponsible and immoral conduct.”

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak gathered several of his followers, gave them travel expenses, and charged them to travel to all the surrounding Jewish communities and to announce in the market-places a rousing decree in his name:

“I, Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev, hereby proclaim to all listeners: there is a God in the world!”



Doing God’s Work

It happened once that Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev noticed a man walking in great haste. There was a sense of urgency about him.

The rabbi stopped him and asked, “What is your occupation Reb Yid?”

“I have no time to talk with your honor right now,” answered the man.

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak persisted and asked, “Nevertheless, what is it you do?”

The man replied, “I humbly request from your honor not to delay me right now. I am dealing with some pressing business.”

Loving and Beloved

But Rabbi Levi Yitzhak refused to let him alone, and said, “Alright, alright, your business is stressing you. And your business is immense. But I am not asking you about your many businesses, but about your one main occupation. What is it?”

The man looked at him with surprise; he did not understand what the rabbi was talking about.

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak explained: “All your hard work is for the Blessed Holy One, in other words, to nourish the soul which God gave you. But your daily bread is the responsibility of the Holy Creator, while your job is to serve God. Therefore, why do you neglect your one job and run after the tasks of the Blessed Holy One?”



Don't Run

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev noticed a man running in the street, and asked him, “Reb Yid, what are you running after?”

“I'm running to make a living,” he replied.

“Dear Reb Yid, who is to say your livelihood is in front of you, and you must chase after it? Perhaps it is behind you, and you are running away from it?”



His Paths Are Hidden

“There are worlds in which one can see the face of the *Shekhina* (Divine Presence).

These are the upper worlds, in which are revealed love and awe of God.

But in our world, His kingdom is hidden and His ways are concealed.

All the worlds – from the world in which the Throne of Glory is
found, to the lower world – long to worship God, the liv-
ing Creator,
Since all their vitality comes to them from Him.
Those who live in the lower world, the world of humans,
Desire that God enlighten their world,
Just as He always enlightens the upper worlds.
They desire that His ways and His kingdom be revealed to light
the world,
And that all humans will worship Him.
Like misers who dream of wealth,
So do those who live in the world below dream and long
That His ways and His kingdom will be revealed,
Since they are poor in knowledge of God.”

Between Man and His Fellow Man

The Sanctuary of Love

Rabbi Shmuel of Sokhatshov, author of *Shem MiShmuel*, told his followers:

My grandfather, Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotzk, was asked by one of his Hasidim: “May our master please teach us, why was there great love among Hasidim in the first generation, which has expired in our time?”

Rabbi Menahem Mendel answered: “There is a sanctuary in heaven above, called love. It was opened by Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev, for love of friends, for devotion of Hasidim. What did the evil people of the generation do? They used the light of that love for strange and foreign passions.

“The righteous people of that generation gathered together – and sealed the door of that sanctuary. Hence, through our sins, the love among the Hasidim has ceased.”



The Halakhic Decision

A *din Torah* between two business agents took place in the court of Rabbi Levi Yitzhak in Berdichev. The stronger did not agree to pay the other his share, in accordance with the decision of the court.

Immediately, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak sent a messenger of the *beit din* to summon the stronger agent. When he appeared, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak said to him:

“You should know that I also have expertise in the world of brokerage. I am the agent between the Jewish people and their Father in Heaven. I present the merits of Israel in the heavens, and bring back for them an abundance of blessings. Once, I made an exchange like this with the Master of the universe. I noticed that the Jewish people had three kinds of merchandise: sins, transgressions, and crimes. And up in heaven I also saw three kinds of merchandise: forgiveness, pardon, and atonement. I offered an exchange in heaven, and they agreed immediately. But they advised me to first speak to the people.

“I spoke with them, and at first they did not agree to the exchange. I negotiated with them and said to them, ‘If you are not satisfied with these three wares that I brought down to you from heaven, then I will add three more: my son, my life, and my sustenance.’ I ascended to heaven and requested these additions, and they agreed. Then I was asked in heaven, ‘What do you want as payment for your mediation?’ I answered that I do not want anything. But I trust that the Blessed Holy One will reward me in some fashion.

“The Holy One said to me, ‘Levi Yitzhak, this is your reward: the additional goods that you listed, your son, your life, and your sustenance, are yours to distribute to whom you wish, and to take from whom you wish.’

“And know now,” concluded Rabbi Levi Yitzhak, “that if you fulfill the terms of the legal decision, and immediately pay your

debt, well and good. If not, Levi Yitzhak will punish you, as is your due, according to the strict letter of the law.”

The stubborn businessman stood his ground, and ridiculed Rabbi Levi Yitzhak. He went home and mocked the words of the rabbi in front of his wife. Even as he spoke, he fell ill with malaria and began to scream: “My head, my head, oy! My whole body is shivering!” Doctors rushed to his side, but nothing helped.

When the man saw that he was on the threshold of death, he repented and sent his wife with the bundle of money required to pay off his debt, according to the ruling of Rabbi Levi Yitzhak.



A Sharp Tongue

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak did not waver when it came to financial disputes. He upheld not only his authority, but also his honor, and didn't spare those who behaved irreverently his sharp tongue.

It happened once that one of the disputants in a financial case, who was looking for an excuse to evade the judgement of Rabbi Levi Yitzhak, asked, “Since when is the rabbi of Berdichev an expert in matters of commerce?”

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak responded immediately with a mild jab:

“I tend to agree that with regard to heavenly matters your honor is more of an expert than I. In matters of Torah study, your honor is more adept than I. In areas of piety, your honor excels. But in matters of the world of commerce, I am an authority. In such matters, I am quite at home. Thus, your honor is obliged to accept my decision.”



At the Meal of the Seven Shepherds

Often an honest but ignorant person would join Rabbi Levi Yitzhak at his table, and the group of students would look at him unkindly, since he was not at all able to grasp the meaning of the words of the tzaddik. After all, what was a boor doing among scholars? However, the naive gentleman did not take offense.

Finally, the students approached the rabbi's wife and requested that she send the fool on his way. But she was unwilling to do so without the permission of the tzaddik. So she related to her husband the doubts and request of the students.

The rabbi replied: "In the future, when the seven shepherds are seated at a holy feast – Adam, Seth, Methuselah on the right side; and Abraham, Jacob, Moses on the left, and David in the middle; and an empty-headed ignoramus arrives to join them – whose name is Levi Yitzhak – it seems to me that they will nod their heads to the fool, and greet him kindly."



Love of the Jewish People

"Since one God created all of us,
And the souls of Israel come from a single source,
When one of us feels pain,
His friend should feel it too.
And when one Jew experiences joy,
His friend should feel it too,
Like a person who feels pain in one limb,
And the whole body senses it."



Removing the Hatred in My Heart

“Until I expunge the flaw of hatred from my heart,
I cannot view myself as a man,
And I imagine myself as though I am not truly alive.”