

Classic Poetry Series

Yehudah HaLevi

- poems -

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Yehudah HaLevi(1075 - 1141)

Yehudah ha-Levi is one of the best-known Spanish Jewish poets. Born in Toledo when it was still under Islamic rule, he became a prolific writer of both Arabic and Hebrew poetry. His writing touches on themes such as love, friendship, religious devotion, hope, wisdom, and sorrow.

Ha-Levi's most famous work is *The Kuzari*, comprised of 5 essays written between 1120 and 1140. *The Kuzari* tells how the king of the Khazars decided to adopt Judaism after consulting with apologists for the Christian, Islamic, and Judaic religions. According to Rabbi Eliyahu (the "Gaon") of Vilna, *The Kuzari* is "holy and pure, and the fundamentals of Israel's faith and the Torah are contained within." It has been translated into Hebrew, Ladino, English, French, German, and several other languages.

A Longing To Return To The Land Of Israel

My heart is in the east, and I in the uttermost west.
How can I find savor in food? How shall it be sweet to me?
How shall I render my vows and my bonds, while yet
Zion lieth beneath the fetter of Edom, and I in Arab chains?
A light thing would it seem to me
to leave all the good things of Spain -
Seeing how precious in mine eyes
to behold the dust of the desolate sanctuary.

Yehudah HaLevi

A Love Song

'Do you see over my shoulders falling,
Snake-like ringlets waving free?
Have no fear, for they are twisted
To allure you unto me.'

Thus she spoke, the gentle dove,
Listen to your plighted love:
'Oh, how long I wait, till my sweetheart comes back,' she said,
'Laying his caressing hand underneath my burning head.'

Yehudah HaLevi

Admonition

Long in the lap of childhood didst thou sleep,
Think how thy youth like chaff did disappear;
Shall life's sweet Spring forever last? Look up,
Old age approaches ominously near.
Oh shake thou off the world, even as the bird
Shakes off the midnight dew that clogged his wings.
Soar upward, seek redemption from thy guilt
And from the earthly dross that round thee clings.
Draw near to God, His holy angels know,
For whom His bounteous streams of mercy flow.

Translated by Emma Lazarus

Yehudah HaLevi

At Morning

O Lord, my life was known to Thee
Ere Thou had'st caused me yet to be,
Thy spirit ever dwells in me.

Could I, cast down by Thee, have gained
A standing place, or, if restrained
By Thee, go forth with feet unchained?

Hear me, Almighty, while I pray;
My thoughts are in Thy hand alway.
Be to my helplessness a stay!

O may this hour Thy favour yield,
And may I tread life's battle-field
Encompassed by Thy mercy's shield.

Wake me at dawn Thy name to bless,
And in Thy sanctuary's recess
To praise and laud Thy holiness.

Translated by Alice Lucas

Yehudah HaLevi

Awake, My Fair

Awake, my fair, my love, awake,
So that I may gaze upon you!
And if one is eager to kiss your lips,
In your dreams this do you see,
Lo, then I myself of your dream
The interpreter will be.

Yehudah HaLevi

Ayin Nedivah ('Generous Eye'): Qasida For Solomon Ibn Ghiyyat

I can't stop crying.
My eyes are like peddler women.
What they buy is: you are gone.
What they sell is: tears,
And business is good:
Enough tears for a jeweled necklace.

I am weeping here in the ruins
Where lovers used to live.
I can't hear a thing.
I can't say a word.
Wasn't it enough for you
To break our home when you left?
Why did you break my heart?

The place doesn't even look the same.
I don't even recognize it.
Only my heart tells me if I am in the right place;
My eyes deny it.

Good luck on your journey.
You take with you the tears that I gave you
And my sleep that you stole.

I could forget my lover
Were it not for the stars
Which remind me.

The moon is conspiring against the sun, her king.
She thinks he has gone traveling in the Western Sea
And drowned.
Unsheathing her swords of lightning
She strikes the earth's back with her staffs of fire.
The lightning bolts dance,
Swirl their golden skirts and sway.
The earth joins battle in its armor of darkness;
The stars hurl their javelins of light.

The moon flees and grows dim,
But now she stands on the face of the sky
Like a golden brooch on a cloak,
Her face red with the dust of battle
Like the face of a queen leading her armies.

I am a shepherd. My flock is the stars;
I herd them, leading them home.
They move as slowly as if they were sick or lame.

I weep for the Twins, who are always apart.
I am jealous of the Pleiades, who are together for eternity.
Does Orion reach out his hand to touch his neighbor?
Or to measure the distance between the spheres?

Where is the sun? Has its chariot broken a wheel?
Has the road it travels been cut off?
The gates of the East—are they locked?

When will ebony turn to pearls?
When will this black veil be lifted and the white cheek revealed?
I hate this night.
The moon looks to me
Like a scab on the skin of an African.

When I see the first tongues of fire, I shall rejoice.

A night like an African.
"Can the Ethiopian change his skin?"
A sky like a leopard,
Spotted with stars.
Dark forevermore.
I give up. My eyes will never see the warm sun. Too late.

A breeze is stealing between the trees,
Whispering to the willows a rumor of a secret love.
The birds are twittering.
Far away, a pigeon-dove murmurs a poem. As the night folds her wings,
A light rain of beauty is falling,
Raining down the dew of love like manna.
There is a fragrance like incense or myrrh.
Has Solomon sent me a poem, perfumed, wrapped to a pigeon-dove's leg?

From the poem's lines of black letters, greetings break forth like the dawn,
Light amid the grey morning,
Letters ink-black as night, but words bright as the dawn,
Like a girl who hides her cheeks behind her dark hair.
A poem not just perfumed but mined from the hills of perfume!
"Comely am I and black,"
Pitch-black letters like the black tents of Kedar
On paper like the white tents of Solomon.

Marvels never seen: letters carved from fiery rock.
Shall these pages contain the flame of his words
Or will they feed the fire? When did fire not conquer straw?
These words are locked now within my heart,
Engraved there letter for letter
Placed there forever.
His poem is like a tapestry woven by the hands of thought,
Framed with beauty,
Worn like a crown.
His poem is like a song of jeweled fruit,
A song, a poem for the reader to taste.
My tongue shall sing it on a glass of wine.

Here, for you, are the fruits of my poetry
Ripe after months of waiting.
But for my love you need never wait.

A poem from your friend,
Whose fame has waited
Until after his best days.
Now he is so well known
That what he does not write
May be an oral tradition.

He follows generous friends
And seeks out their company.
He is never far away.
If they are a hand, he is their thumb.

Men sleep until the dawn awakes them,
But his soul is awake and his heart wakes the dawn,
To seek the love of his friend,
Pure love, inside and out.

Take from my clumsy lips these golden words of poetry;
Place them around your neck.
Wear them like a bracelet.
For they are daughters of love, mined from the hill of love,
Given to you for your love like a dowry.

The morning breeze warms the face of every lover,
But to me it shall always say: All is well with Solomon. Shalom.

Translated by Joseph Davis

Yehudah HaLevi

Cups Without Wine

Cups without wine are low things
Like a pot thrown to the ground,
But brimming with the juice, they shine
Like body and soul.

Translated by Robert Mezey

Yehudah HaLevi

Do These Tears Know?

Do these tears know who made them fall?
Do these hearts know who made them recoil?
They recoiled when their shining light sank into the earth,
and the clods of earth knew not what they hold.
They hold a princely man,
a good man, blameless, upright,
a God-fearing man, discreet and wise.

translated by T. Carmi

Yehudah HaLevi

Fortune's Treachery

When Fortune's shield protects you, then beware --
Tomorrow, for your foot she sets a snare.
Her gift, an eaglet's pinion -- now your flight,
Anon, the lethal arrow -- to upbear!

Based on the translation by Solomon Solis-Cohen that's reproduced on page 377 of *A Treasury of Jewish Poetry: From Biblical Times to the Present*, edited by Nathan and Marynn Ausubel (Crown Publishers, 1957).

Yehudah HaLevi

God, Whom Shall I Compare To Thee?

God, whom shall I compare to Thee,
When Thou to none canst likened be?
Under what image shall I dare
To picture Thee, when everywhere
All nature's forms Thine impress bear?

Greater, O Lord, Thy glories are
Than all the heavenly chariots far.
Whose mind can grasp Thy world's design?
Whose word can fitly Thee define?
Whose tongue set forth Thy powers divine?

Can heart approach, can eye behold
Thee in Thy righteousness untold?
Whom did'st Thou to Thy counsel call,
When there was none to speak withal
Since Thou wast first and Lord of all?

Thy world eternal witness bears
That none its Maker's glory shares.
Thy wisdom is made manifest
In all things formed by Thy behest,
All with Thy seal's clear mark impress'd.

Before the pillars of the sky
Were raised, before the mountains high
Were wrought, ere hills and dales were known,
Thou in Thy majesty alone
Did'st sit, O God, upon Thy throne!

Hearts, seeking Thee, from search refrain,
And weary tongues their praise restrain,
Thyself unbound by time and place,
Thou dost pervade, support, embrace
The world and all created space.

The sages' minds bewildered grow,
The lightning speed of thought is slow.
'Awful in praises' art Thou named;

Thou fillest, strong in strength proclaimed,
This universe Thy hand has framed.

Deep, deep beyond all fathoming,
Far, far beyond all measuring,
We can but seek Thy deeds alone;
When bow Thy saints before Thy throne
Then is Thy faithfulness made known.

Thy righteousness we can discern,
Thy holy law proclaim and learn.
Is not Thy presence near always
To them who penitently pray.
But far from those who sinning stray?

Pure souls behold Thee, and no need
Have they of light: they hear and heed
Thee with the mind's keen ear, although
The ear of flesh be dull and slow.
Their voices answer to and fro.

Thy holiness for ever they proclaim:
The Lord of Hosts! thrice holy is His name!

Translated by Alice Lucas

Yehudah HaLevi

He Comes

He comes, O bliss!
Fly swiftly, you winds,
You odorous breezes,
And tell him how long
I've waited for this!

O happy that night,
When sunk on your breast,
Your kisses fast falling,
And drunken with love,
My troth I did plight.

Again my sweet friend
Embrace me close.
Yes, heaven does bless us,
And now you have won
My love without end.

Yehudah HaLevi

Hymn For Atonement Day

Lord, Your humble servants hear,
Suppliant now before You,
Our Father, from Your children's plea
Turn not, we implore You!

Lord, Your people, sore oppressed,
From the depths implore You;
Our Father, let us not, this day,
Cry in vain before You.

Lord, blot out our evil pride,
All our sins before You;
Our Father, for Your Mercy's sake,
Pardon, we implore You.

Lord, no sacrifice we bring,
Prayers and tears implore You;
Our Father, take the gift we lay,
Contrite hearts, before You.

Lord, Your sheep have wandered far,
Gather them before You;
Our Father, let Your shepherd love
Guide us, we implore You.

Lord, Your pardon grant to all
That in truth, implore You;
Our Father, let our evening prayer
Now find grace before You.

Lord, Your humble servants hear,
Suppliant now before You;
Our Father, from Your children's plea
Turn not, we implore You!

Yehudah HaLevi

Marriage Song

Fair is my dove, my loved one,
None can with her compare:
Yea, comely as Jerusalem,
Like unto Tirzah fair.

Shall she in tents unstable
A wanderer abide,
While in my heart awaits her
A dwelling deep and wide?

The magic of her beauty
Has stolen my heart away:
Not Egypt's wise enchanters
Held half such wondrous sway.

Even as the changing opal
In varying luster glows,
Her face at every moment
New charms and sweetness shows.

White lilies and red roses
There blossom on one stem:
Her lips of crimson berries
Tempt mine to gather them.

By dusky tresses shaded
Her brow gleams fair and pale,
Like to the sun at twilight,
Behind a cloudy veil.

Her beauty shames the day-star,
And makes the darkness light:
Day in her radiant presence
Grows seven times more bright.

This is a lonely lover!
Come, fair one, to his side,
That happy be together
The bridegroom and the bride!

The hour of love approaches
That shall make one of twain:
Soon may be thus united
All Israel's hosts again!

Yehudah HaLevi

Mount Avarim

Shalom, Mount Avarim. Blessed be your slopes.
Somewhere on you the greatest of men was gathered,
Sacred bones now buried deep in your side.
If you do not know him, ask the Red Sea,
Ask the green bush, ask Sinai, and they will tell you:
"He was not a man of words, but he did God's work."
I have vowed to visit you soon, God willing.

Translated by Robert Mezey

Yehudah HaLevi

My Heart Is In The East

My heart is in the east, and I in the uttermost west—
How can I find savour in food? How shall it be sweet to me?
How shall I render my vows and my bonds, while yet
Zion lieth beneath the fetter of Edom, and I in Arab chains?
A light thing would it seem to me to leave all the good things of Spain—
Seeing how precious in mine eyes to behold the dust of the desolate sanctuary.

Translated by Nina Salaman

Yehudah HaLevi

My Sweetheart's Dainty Lips

My sweetheart's dainty lips are red,
With ruby's crimson overspread;
Her teeth are like a string of pearls;
Down her neck her clustering curls
In ebony hue vie with the night,
And over her features dances light.

The twinkling stars enthroned above
Are sisters to my dearest love.
We men should count it joy complete
To lay our service at her feet.
But oh what rapture is her kiss!
A forecast 'tis of heavenly bliss!

Yehudah HaLevi

O My Lord, Your Dwelling Places Are Lovely

O My Lord, Your dwelling places are lovely
Your Presence is manifest, not in mystery.
My dream brought me to the Temple of God
And I praised its delightful servants,
And the burnt offering, its meal and libation
Which rose up in great pillars of smoke.
I delighted in the song of the Levites,
In their secrets of the sacrificial service.
Then I woke, and still I was with you, O Lord,
And I gave thanks - for to You it is pleasant to give thanks

Yehudah HaLevi

On The Sea

I.

My God, break not the breakers of the sea,
Nor command to the deep, 'Become dry'.
Until I thank Your mercies, and I thank
The waves of the sea and the wind of the west;
Let them propel me to the place of the yoke of Your love,
And bear far from me the Arab yoke.
And how shall my desires not find fulfillment,
Seeing as I trust in You, and You are pledged to me?

II.

Has the flood come again and made the world a waste
So that one cannot see the face of the dry land,
And no man is there and no beast and no bird?
Have they all come to an end and lain down in sorrow?
To see even a mountain or a marsh would be a rest for me,
And the desert itself would be sweet.
But I look on every side and there is nothing
But water and sky and ark,
And Leviathan causing the abyss to boil,
So that one considers the deep to be hoary,
And the heart of the sea conceals the ship
As though she were a stolen thing in the sea's hand.
As the sea rages, my soul is jubilant -
For my ship draws near to the sanctuary of her God.

III.

To You my soul turns in trust or fear,
It is to you that she always gives thanks and worship;
In You I rejoice on the day I wander forth and flee,
And You I thank in every flight and wandering. -
Indeed, when the ship, to bear me over, spreads out wings like the wings of a
stork,
And when the deep groans and roars beneath me,
As though it had learned from my own entrails,
And makes the abyss to boil like a pot,
Indeed, turns the sea into a pot of burning ointment;
And when the ship from Kittim comes to the sea of the Philistines
And the Hittites come down to the stronghold;

And when creatures press upon the ship
And sea-monsters watch for food,
And there is a time of trouble as of one that brings forth her first child,
When children have approached their birth
But there is no strength to bring them forth.
And though I should lack for food and drink,
I take the sweetness of Your name into my mouth for sustenance;
And I have no care for worldly goods,
Nor for treasures nor for any perishables -
Even so far that I can leave behind [in Spain] her that went forth of my loins,
Sister of my soul - and she my only daughter -
And I can forget her son, though it pierces my heart,
And I have nothing left but his memory for a symbol -
Fruit of my loins, child of my delight -
Ah! How should Yehudah forget [my grandson] Yehudah?
But this is a light thing compared to Your love,
Since I may enter Your gates with thanksgiving,
And sojourn there, and count my heart
A burnt offering bound upon Your altar;
And may make my grave in Your land,
So that it be there a witness for me.

IV.

This is your wind, O perfumed west,
With spikenard and apple in his wings!
You come forth of the treasures of the spice traders -
You are not of the treasures of the wind.
You propel me on swallow's wings, and proclaim liberty for me;
Like pure myrrh from the bundle of spices you have selected.
How men must long for you, which for your sake
Ride over the crest of the sea on the back of a plank!
Stay not your hand from the ship
Either when day abides or in the cool breath of the night;
But beat out the deep, and tear the heart of the seas
And touch the holy mountains, and there will you rest.
Reprimand the east wind which tosses the sea into tempest
Until he makes its heart like a seething pot.
What shall the captive do, in the hand of God,
One moment held back, and one moment sent forth free?
Truly the secret of my quest is in the hand of the Highest,
Who formed the mountain heights and created the wind.

V.

My desire for the living God has constrained me
To seek the place of the throne of my anointed -
Even so that it has not suffered me to kiss
The children of my house, my friends, and my brethren;
And that I do not weep for the orchard which I planted and watered,
Nor for my green shoots that prospered;
And that I abandoned Yehudah and Azariel,
My two beautiful choice flowers;
And Yitzhak, whom I counted as my child,
Fruit of the sun, best of the growth of my moons;
And that I have all but forgotten the house of prayer
In whose place of learning was my rest,
And that I forget the delights of my Sabbaths,
The beauty of my festivals, the glory of my Passovers,
And have given my glory unto others,
And renounced my praise unto graven images.
I have exchanged my abode for a shadow of shrubs,
And for a hedge in the thicket my strong bars;
My soul is satisfied with the chief spices,
And the scent of the thornbush I use now for perfume;
And I have ceased to walk with my face bending to the ground [in forced servility
to other men]
But have set my paths in the heart of the seas -
With the ultimate goal that I may find the footstool of my God,
And be able to pour out my soul with my thoughts,
And stand at the threshold of His holy mount and set open
Towards the doors of Heaven's gates, my doors,
And suffer my spikenard to flower by the waters of the Jordan,
And put forth my shoots by Siloah.
The Lord is with me, how shall I fear or dread,
Since the angel of His mercy bears my weapons?
I shall praise His name while I still am alive,
And thank Him for eternity.

VI.

I say in the heart of the seas to the quaking heart,
Fearing greatly because they lift up their waves;
If you believe in God who made the sea,
And whose Name stands for eternity,
The sea shall not frighten you when its waves rise up,
For with you is One who has set a bound to the sea.

VII.

I cry out to God with a melting heart and knees that strike against each other,
While anguish is in all loins,
On a day when the oarsmen are astounded at the deep,
When even the pilots find not their hands.
How shall I be otherwise, since I, on a ship's deck,
Suspended between the waters and the heavens,
Am dancing and tossed about?
But this is merely a light thing,
If I may eventually hold a joyous dance in the midst of you, O Jerusalem!

VIII.

Call greeting unto daughters and relatives,
Peace to brothers and to sisters,
From the captive of hope who is possessed by the sea,
And has placed his spirit in the hand of the winds,
Thrust by the hand of the west into the hand of the east:
This one passes to lead on, and that one to thrust back.
Between him and death is but a step,
Yes, between them is merely the thickness of a plank;
Buried alive in a coffin of wood,
Upon no floor, with no four cubits of earth,
Nor even with less.
He sits - he cannot stand upon his feet,
He lies down - he cannot stretch them forth;
Sick and afraid because of the heathen
And because of the marauders and the winds.
The pilot and the mariner, and all their rabble -
They are the rulers and captains there.
Fame is not to the wise, nor yet favor to skilled men,
Save only to those that have skill to swim.
My face is troubled at this for a moment
(How should the innermost heart rejoice?),
Until I pour out my soul into the bosom of God,
Before the place of the Ark and the altars,
And bestow upon God, who bestows good things upon the unworthy,
The goodness of songs and praise.

translated by Nina Salaman

Sabbath, My Love

greet my love with wine and gladsome lay;
Welcome, thrice welcome, joyous Seventh Day!

Six slaves the weekdays are; I share
With them a round of toil and care,
Yet light the burdens seem, I bear
For your sweet sake, Sabbath, my love!

On the First-day to the accustomed task
I go content, nor reward ask,
Save in your smile, at length, to bask --
Day blessed of God, Sabbath, my love!

Is the Second-day dull, the Third-day unbright?
Hide sun and stars from the Fourth-day's sight?
What need I care, who have your light,
Orb of my life, Sabbath, my love!

The Fifth-day, joyful tidings ring:
"The morrow shall your freedom bring!"
At dawn a slave, at eve a king --
God's table waits, Sabbath, my love!

On the Sixth-day does my cup overflow,
What blissful rest the night shall know,
When, in your arms, my toil and woe
Are all forgotten, Sabbath, my love!

Now it's dusk. With sudden light distilled
From one sweet face, the world is filled;
The tumult of my heart is stilled --
For you have arrived, Sabbath, my love!

Bring fruits and wine, and sing a cheerful lay,
Chant: "Come in peace, O blissful Seventh Day!"

Yehudah HaLevi

Song

Let the morning pursue me
with the wind that senses her body.
Let the clouds carry my message.
Then might she yield.

Lying in the constellation of The Bear,
have pity, gazelle, on him who must fly
to the stars to reach you.

Yehudah HaLevi

The Apple

You have enslaved me with your lovely body;
You have put me in a kind of prison.
Since the day we parted,
I have found nothing that is like your beauty.
So I comfort myself with a ripe apple—
Its fragrance reminds me of the myrrh of your breath,
Its shape of your breasts, its color
Of the color that used to rise to your cheeks.

Yehudah HaLevi

The Fair Maiden

The night when the fair maiden revealed the likeness of her form to me,
The warmth of her cheeks, the veil of her hair,
Golden like a topaz, covering
A brow of smoothest crystal—
She was like the sun making red in her rising
The clouds of dawn with the flame of her light.

Translated by Nina Salaman

Yehudah HaLevi

The Grey Hair

One day I observed a grey hair in my head;
I plucked it right out, when it thus to me said:
'You may smile, if you wish, at your treatment of me,
But a score of my friends soon will make a mockery of you.'

Yehudah HaLevi

The Home Of Love

Ever since You were the home of love for me, my love has lived where You have lived. Because of You, I have delighted in the wrath of my enemies; let them be, let them torment the one whom You tormented. It was from You that they learned their wrath, and I love them, for they hound the wounded one whom You struck down. Ever since You despised me, I have despised myself, for I will not honour what You despise. So be it, until Your anger has passed, and again You will redeem

Your own possession, which You once redeemed.**

**From the bondage of Egypt.

Translated by T. Carmi

Yehudah HaLevi

The Meeting Of The Stars

The stars of the world have joined to-day.
'Mid the host on high none are found like these.
The Pleiads desire such unity,
For no breath can come between them.
The star of the east hath come to the west;
He hath found the sun among the daughters thereof.
He hath set up a bower of thick branches;
He hath made of them a tent for the sun.

Translated by Nina Salaman

Yehudah HaLevi

The Mirror

Into my eyes he lovingly looked,
My arms about his neck were twined,
And in the mirror of my eyes,
What but his image did he find?

Upon my dark-hued eyes he pressed
His lips with breath of passion rare.
The rogue! 'Twas not my eyes he kissed;
He kissed his picture mirrored there.

Yehudah HaLevi

The Physician's Prayer

My God, heal me and I shall be healed,
Let not Thine anger be kindled against me so that I be consumed.
My medicines are of Thee, whether good
Or evil, whether strong or weak.
It is Thou who shalt choose, not I;
Of Thy knowledge is the evil and the fair.
Not upon my power of healing I rely;
Only for Thine healing do I watch.

Translated by Nina Salaman

Yehudah HaLevi

The Seventh Day

Forget not the day of the Sabbath,
Its mention is like a pleasant offering.
During it the dove found resting place,
And there the weary may relax.
The day is honored by the Children of Faith,
Careful to observe it are fathers and sons.
Engraved upon two tablets of stone,
From great power and mighty strength.
And they all came in Covenant together,
In unison they said, "We shall do and we shall listen."
And they commenced and answered, "God is One,"
Blessed is He that gives strength to the weary.
He spoke in His holiness by the mountain of Mohr spice
"Remember and guard the seventh day."
And all of his commandments to be completed together
Strengthen the loins and gather up power.
The nation that is in motion, like lost sheep,
By covenant He will remember to recall it,
So that an evil happening may not befall them,
Just as You have sworn by the waters of Noah.

Yehudah HaLevi

Time-Servers

Time-servers are the cowering slaves of slaves,
Alone on earth, who serves the Lord is free,
Each soul shall win the gift that it most craves;
Seek God, my soul -- God shall your portion be!

Based on the translation by Solomon Solis-Cohen that's reproduced on pages 376-377 of *A Treasury of Jewish Poetry: From Biblical Times to the Present*, edited by Nathan and Maryynn Ausubel (Crown Publishers, 1957).

Yehudah HaLevi

To Israel, In Exile

O Sleeper whose heart is awake, burning and raging, now wake and go forth, and walk in the light of My presence. Rise, and ride on! A star has come forth for you, and he who has lain in the pit will go up to the top of Sinai. Let them not exult, those who say, 'Zion is desolate!'—for My heart is in Zion and My eyes are there. I reveal Myself and I conceal Myself, now I rage, now I consent—but who has more compassion than I have for My children?

Translated by T. Carmi

Yehudah HaLevi

To The Rivals

The lovely doe, far from her home, whose lover is angry—why did she laugh? She laughed at the daughter of Edom and the daughter of Arabia who covet her beloved. Why, they are nothing but wild asses, and how can they compare to the doe who nestled against her gazelle? Where is the spirit of prophecy found, where the lampstand, the Ark of the Covenant, the ever-present Shekinah? No, my rivals, do not try to quench love, for if you do, it will blaze up like fire!

Translated by T. Carmi

Yehudah HaLevi

When My Soul Longed - The Beginning Of His Journey

That day when my soul longed for the place of assembly,
Yet a dread of departure seized hold of me,
He, great in counsel, prepared for me ways for setting forth,
And I found His name in my heart a sustainment.
Therefore I bow down to Him at every stage;
And at every step I thank Him.

Translated by Nina Salaman

Yehudah HaLevi

Where Shall I Find Thee?

O Lord, where shall I find Thee?
All-hidden and exalted is Thy place;
And where shall I not find Thee?
Full of Thy glory is the infinite space.

Found near-abiding ever,
He made the earth's ends, set their utmost bar;
Unto the nigh a refuge,
Yea, and a trust to them who wait afar.
Thou sittest throned between the Cherubim,
Thou dwellest high above the cloud rack dim.
Praised by Thine hosts and yet beyond their praises
Forever far exalt;
The endless whirl of worlds may not contain Thee,
How, then, one heaven's vault?

And Thou, withal uplifted
O'er man, upon a mighty throne apart,
Art yet forever near him,
Breath of his spirit, life-blood of his heart.
His own mouth speaketh testimony true
That Thou his Maker art alone; for who
Shall say he hath not seen Thee? Lo! the heavens
And all their host aflame
With glory show Thy fear in speech unuttered,
With silent voice proclaim.

Longing I sought Thy presence,
Lord, with my whole heart did I call and pray,
And going out toward Thee,
I found Thee coming to me on the way;
Yea, in Thy wonders' might as clear to see
As when within the shrine I looked for Thee.
Who shall not fear Thee? Lo! upon their shoulders
Thy yoke divinely dread!
Who shall forbear to cry to Thee, That givest
To all their daily bread?

And can the Lord God truly—

God, the Most High—dwell here within man's breast?
What shall he answer, pondering—
Man, whose foundations in the dust do rest?
For Thou art holy, dwelling 'mid the praise
Of them that waft Thee worship all their days.
Angels adoring, singing of Thy wonder,
Stand upon Heaven's height;
And Thou, enthroned o'erhead, all things upholdest
With everlasting might.

Translated by Nina Davis

Yehudah HaLevi

Who Is Like Thee

Who is like Thee, revealing the deeps,
Fearful in praises, doing wonders?

The Creator who discovereth all from nothing,
Is revealed to the heart, but not to the eye;
Therefore ask not how nor where—
For He filleth heaven and earth.

Remove lust from the midst of thee;
Thou wilt find thy God within thy bosom,
Walking gently in thine heart—
He that bringeth low and that lifteth up.

And see the way of the soul's secret;
Search it out and refresh thee.
He will make thee wise, and thou wilt find freedom,
For thou art a captive and the world is a prison.

Make knowledge the envoy between thyself and Him;
Annul thy will and do His will;
And know that wheresoever thou hidest thee, there is His eye,
And nothing is too hard for Him.

He was the Living while there was yet no dust of the world;
And He is the Maker and He the Bearer;
And man is counted as a fading flower—
Soon to fade, as fadeth a leaf.

Translated by Nina Salaman

Yehudah HaLevi