

Great Tongues of Roaring Fire

There was a brilliant young man in Romania who appeared to be headed for greatness in Torah scholarship, but his curiosity drew him to read many books on the philosophy and theology of other religions.

Before long, he became exceedingly confused. He had always accepted his Jewish heritage as a matter of course. That was how he had been brought up, that was how he lived, and therefore, that was what he believed. His exposure to other ideas and views, however, disrupted his equanimity.

He floundered and wandered, and eventually, he decided to abandon Judaism and convert. He decided to pay a visit to the local priest to discuss his plans for conversion.

The next morning, as he walked toward the church, his heart was pounding violently. Should he go through with it? Was this the right thing to do? Was he really sure?

Lost in his tormenting thoughts, he hardly noticed his surroundings. Suddenly, he found himself in the midst of a large crowd, being jostled from all sides. "What going on?" he asked a red-faced man pushing his way through the crowd.

The man paused in his pushing and looked at him in dismay. "Where have you been, my friend? Have you been hiding in a hole under the ground? The holy **Rabbi Levi-Yitzchak of Berdichev** is here, and he is going to lead the Morning Prayers in the synagogue.

"Hearing him pray is the experience of a lifetime. His holy words are like great tongues of roaring fire reaching out to the gates of Heaven. It is impossible to hear him and not be inspired. Don't you know that?"

"So I've heard," said the young man.

Despite his resolve to meet with the priest, he was overcome with a desire to hear the prayers of a holy *tzadik* one last time before he converted.

The crowd was very dense, almost impenetrable, but he fought and clawed his way forward and reached close enough to the entrance of the shul to hear the sweet passion of the R. Levi-Yitzchak's voice.

The words, although faint and distant, tugged at his heart and soul, and he yearned to hear them better. With a sudden surge of strength that he did not know he possessed, he forced his way through the crowd and plunged into the shul, exhausted but exhilarated.

The Berditchever was standing at the prayer leader's stand, tightly wrapped in his *tallit*, trembling violently with fiery devotion, his hands outstretched toward the heavens.

He was saying the second of the two blessings that precede Shema prayer, the one that beseeches the Creator to give us the wisdom to understand the Torah and properly fulfill its commandments. All of a sudden he interjected in Yiddish, saying, "Master of the Universe, You have so many angels," and then went on to describe the many different kinds of angels that inhabit the upper worlds.

"They all serve You, and I, Levi-Yitzchok ben Sara-Sosha, want to serve You as well."

He paused for a moment, and his whole body quaked and shook with intense concentration. "***Veha'ir eineinu besorasecha!***" he thundered. "**Enlighten our eyes with Your Torah!**"

The Rebbe's words penetrated to the very depths of the young man's heart, and the floodgates of his tears burst open. He wept and wept until he could weep no more, and right then and there, he abandoned his misguided notions of conversion and resolved to remain a faithful Jew.

Right after the conclusion of the prayers, as soon as R. Levi Yitzchok stepped away from the stand, he came over to the astonished young man and took him by the hand. "Come sit by my side, young man," he said in a gentle tone. "Stay next to me the entire day, and you will be fine."

From that day on, the young man lived an inspired life. He learned Torah and served the Al-mighty diligently. Eventually, he became an important rabbi, and a known tzadik in his own right.

Over the years he told his story to a few individuals, but it is generally retold without mention of his name, in deference to the greatness that he achieved after his encounter with Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev.

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*Source:* Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from the version of [rebisroel@aol.com](mailto:rebisroel@aol.com) (original source unclear).

**Bio:** **Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev** [of blessed memory: 5500 - 25 Tishrei 5571 (1740 - Oct. 1810)] is one of the more popular rebbes in chasidic history. He was a close disciple of the *Maggid of Mezritch*, successor to the *Baal Shem Tov*. He is best known for his love for every Jew and his perpetual intercession before Heaven on their behalf. Many of his teachings are contained in the posthumously published *Kedushat Levi*.

*Connection:* This Thursday, Tishrei 25, is the 218th *yahrzeit* of the Berditchever.