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Dudeleh

Ribono Shel Olam

(voice & piano or guitar)

www.alexandermassey.com

Dudeleh

Ribono Shel Olam

The poem that has become known as *Dudeleh* (also as *A dudele*) was written in Yiddish by Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (1740-1809), one of the foremost rabbis of Chasidism.¹ *Du* is the informal word for ‘you’; *-eleh* as an ending can mean ‘little’, or be a way to increase the sense of tenderness and closeness. So this poem directly addresses God intimately and lovingly as *du*.²

Reb Levi Yitzchak took to heart the central Chasidic text “There is no place empty of God” (Tikkunei Zohar 57), that draws from Ps. 139:7: “Where can I flee from Your Presence?” Whatever underlying Reality the word God points towards, It both surrounds and permeates everything that exists. Reb Levi Yitzchak’s words express his passion, devotion and central preoccupation – to experience and know God in everything and at all times.

I find this text profoundly moving. On the one hand, Reb Levi Yitzchak uses the diminutive form *dudeleh*, suggesting that this song is ‘just a little something’ of no particular consequence. We could hear the numerous repetitions of *du* (you) as if they are part of a wordless *nigun* (like ‘doo doo doo’, or ‘yu yu yu’). But this poem takes us to the core of Reb Levi Yitzchak’s theology: God is One, there is no Other, God is Every Thing, Every Where, and available. Knowing that, and living that knowledge, is life-changing. The poem’s power comes from its clarity, open-heartedness and simplicity. To say these words, to sing them, can be transformative.

Rabbi Zalman Shachter-Shalomi made a lovely translation and adaptation of Reb Levi Yitzchak’s poem.³ I have made minor adjustments to this to create the lyric for this song. Although *Ribono shel olam* means ‘Master of the Universe’, in Chasidic and neo-Chasidic circles, this is a colloquial way of addressing God, and indicates a personal and warm relationship. I have repeated the phrase four times at the start of the song, as a reference to the four kabbalistic worlds of *assiyah* (body), *yetzirah*

¹ The mystical Jewish movement called Chasidism dominated Eastern Europe, Poland and Ukraine in the 18th century, and continues to inspire Jews even now, nourishing the roots and new shoots and fruits of neo-Chasidism and Jewish Renewal.

² To reflect this intimacy, I have chosen to spell ‘you’ with a lower case ‘y’. A capital ‘Y’ would suggest formality, deference and distance, all qualities that are contrary to what this poem is expressing. The archaic form ‘thou’ seen in older translations of scripture is commonly misunderstood as a formal address. However, in the English language of the time when the translations originated, ‘thou’ was the *intimate* and casual form of address of familiarity, while the word ‘you’ was reserved for formal relationships, especially between people of different status. In modern times ‘You’ (capital Y) on the page can feel like a deferential way to address God as our superior, while ‘you’ (lower case y) can be indicate a more friendly relationship.

³ **Zalman Shachter-Shalomi & Netanel Miles-Yepez (2010)** A Merciful God: stories and teachings of the Holy Rebbe, Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, Albion Andalus, Boulder, p.87-8



(emotion), *beriah* (mind) and *atzilut* (spirit/union), to represent calling upon and experiencing the totality of God.

Legend tells us that Reb Levi Yitzchak would sing *Dudeleh* with his own melody at *havdalah*, that magical, twilight time when the world is suspended between *Shabbat* and the night that will take us into the new week. *Dudeleh* is a love song to God, to the 'Shabbat bride', to the *Shekhinah*, the feminine, in-dwelling presence of God. Perhaps, when we sing it, it can help us carry some of the soft enchantment and soul-enhancing benefits of *Shabbat* into the week that follows, and maintain a palpable and vibrant relationship with God.



Dudeleh (Ribono Shel Olam)

Music: Alexander Massey

Lyrics: Adapted by Alexander Massey from
Zalman Shachter-Shalomi's translation
of Reb Yitzchak of Berdichev's poem 'Dudeleh'

Yearning, lilting $\text{♩} = 102$

Em

4

Right hand legato, left hand sparse texture.

8

5 B7

lam, _____

Am

Ri - bo-no shel o-lam,

When - e-ver I'm still,

Am/C B7

Ri-bo-no shel o-lam,

you, _____ you.

5

8

10

I'll sing a lit-tle song,

When all goes well,

a song for you, _____

or when things go ill, _____

B7

10

8



Alexander Massey, 2022

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Dudeleh (Ribono Shel Olam) - Massey

14

Am Am/C B7 Em 1. Am 3

you, you, you, on-ly you. Where can I
you, you, you, on-ly you.

14

20 Em 3 Am6 Am/F# Em/G Em

find— you? Where could I not— find— you? You,— you,—

20

Pedal freely

25 Am C7 B7 2. Am7 D7

you, on-ly you. Where To East, you, to West, you, to

25

Pedal freely

Dudeleh (Ribono Shel Olam) - Massey

30 Gmaj7 Cmaj7 Am6/F[#] Bsus

North, you, to South, you, to Hea-ven, you, to Earth, you, be-

34 Em E7 Am7 Dsus D7 Bm7

low, you, a - bove, you. You, _____ you, _____

39 Esus E7 C7 Am/F[#] B7 Em 1. 2.

you, _____ al-ways, on - ly you. To

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Yearning, lilting $\text{♩} = 102$

The musical score consists of eight staves of music for a single voice. The key signature is G major (one sharp). The time signature is 4/4. The music is in common time. The lyrics are in Hebrew and English, with some words in all-caps. The chords are indicated above the staff. The score includes lyrics for the first half of the song, a repeat sign, and lyrics for the second half. The chords used include Em, B7, Am, Am/C, Em, B7, Am, Am/C, B7, Em, Am, Am6, Am/F#, Em/G, Em, Am, C7, B7, D7, Gmaj7, Cmaj7, Am6/F#, B7, E7, Am7, Dsus, D7, Bm7, Esus, E7, C7, Am/F#, B7, Em, and E7.

1. *Ri-bo-no shel o-lam, e- ver I go, Ri-bo-no shel o-lam, you, you. Ri - When-*

5. *bo-no shel o-lam, e- ver I'm still, Ri-bo-no shel o-lam, you, you. I'll sing a lit-tle song, If all goes well,*

10. *a song for you, or if things go ill, you, you, you, on - ly you. you, you, you, on - ly you.*

16. *Where can I find you? Where could I not find you? You, 1. Am 3. Em 3. Am6 Am/F#*

22. *you, you, on - ly you. Where 2. Am7 To East, you, to*

27. *West, you, to North, you, to South, you, to Hea-ven, you, to Earth, you, be-*

32. *Em E7 Am7 Dsus D7 Bm7 low, you, a - bove, you. You, you,*

37. *you, al - ways, on - ly you.*



Alexander Massey, 2022

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