

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Patchwork

(Unwrapping a Hasidic Story)

Buber, Martin: [Tales of the Hasidim](#). Schocken Books, New York. 1991. Page 316



Background to Our Story

Martin Buber



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Buber

Martin Buber (Hebrew: מרטין בובר, German: *Martin Buber*, Yiddish: מארתין בובר; February 8, 1878 – June 13, 1965) was an Austrian-born Israeli Jewish philosopher best known for his philosophy of dialogue, a form of existentialism centered on the distinction between the I–Thou relationship and the I–It relationship. Born in Vienna, Buber came from a family of observant Jews, but broke with Jewish custom to pursue secular studies in philosophy. In 1902, he became the editor of the weekly *Die Welt*, the central organ of the Zionist movement, although he later withdrew from organizational work in Zionism. In 1923, Buber wrote his famous essay on existence, *Ich und Du* (later translated into English as *I and Thou*), and in 1925, he began translating the Hebrew Bible into the German language.

In 1930, Buber became an honorary professor at the University of Frankfurt am Main, but resigned in protest from his professorship immediately after Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933. He then founded the Central Office for Jewish Adult Education, which became an increasingly important body as the German government forbade Jews to attend public education. In 1938, Buber left Germany and settled in Jerusalem, Mandate Palestine (later Israel), receiving a professorship at Hebrew University and lecturing in anthropology and introductory sociology.

Buber's wife Paula died in 1958, and he died at his home in the Talbiya neighborhood of Jerusalem on June 13, 1965. They had two children: a son, Rafael Buber and a daughter, Eva Strauss-Steinitz.

Buber was a scholar, interpreter, and translator of Hasidic lore. He viewed Hasidism as a source of cultural renewal for Judaism, frequently citing examples from the Hasidic tradition that emphasized community, interpersonal life, and meaning in common activities (e.g., a worker's relation to his tools). The Hasidic ideal, according to Buber, emphasized a life lived in the unconditional presence of God, where there was no distinct separation between daily

habits and religious experience. This was a major influence on Buber's philosophy of anthropology, which considered the basis of human existence as dialogical.

In 1906, Buber published *Die Geschichten des Rabbi Nachman*, a collection of the tales of the Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, a renowned Hasidic *rebbe*, as interpreted and retold in a Neo-Hasidic fashion by Buber. Two years later, Buber published *Die Legende des Baalschem* (stories of the Baal Shem Tov), the founder of Hasidism.

Buber's interpretation of the Hasidic tradition, however, has been criticized by scholars such as Chaim Potok for its romanticization. In the introduction to Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim*, Potok notes that Buber overlooked Hasidism's "charlatanism, obscurantism, internecine quarrels, its heavy freight of folk superstition and pietistic excesses, its tzadik worship, its vulgarized and attenuated reading of Lurianic Kabbalah." Even more severe is the criticism that Buber deemphasized the importance of the Jewish Law in Hasidism. This is ironic, considering that Buber often delved into Hasidim to demonstrate that individual religiosity did not require a dogmatic, creedal religion.

Yaakov Yitzchak of Lublin



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yaakov_Yitzchak_of_Lublin

Yaakov Yitzchak (also Jacob Isaac) Horowitz (Polish: *Jakub Izaak Horowicz*, Hebrew: יעקב יצחק הורוביץ), of Lublin, known as "The Chozeh of Lublin" (Hebrew: החוזה מלובלין, The Seer of Lublin), or simply as the "Chozeh", (c. 1745 - August 15, 1815) was a Hasidic rebbe from Poland.

A leading figure in the early Hasidic movement, he became known as the *chozeh*, which means "seer" or "visionary" in Hebrew, due to his great intuitive powers (he was actually nearly blind). He was a disciple of the Maggid of Mezritch. He continued his studies under Rabbi Shmelke of Nilkolsburg and Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk. He lived for a while in Lantzut before moving to Lublin.

After Yaakov Yitzchak moved to Lublin, thousands of Hasidim flocked to learn from him. Among his disciples were such Hasidic luminaries as the Yid Hakodesh ("The Holy Jew"), Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa, Rabbi Meir of Apta, Rabbi David of Lelov, the *Yismach Moshe*, Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov, Rabbi Naftali Zvi of Ropshitz, the *Ma'or Vashemesh*, and *Sar Shalom* of Belz. The Seer of Lublin also gained a reputation as a miracle-worker who could accomplish the tikkun, or repair of the soul, of those who sought his assistance and guidance. During his stay in Lublin, Yaakov Yitzchak was opposed by a prominent rabbi, Rabbi Ezriel Horowitz.

Yaakov Yitzchak was a descendant of Isaiah Horowitz (Hebrew: ישעיה הלוי הורוביץ), also known as the Shelah ha-Kadosh (Hebrew: של"ה הקדוש), a prominent Levite rabbi and mystic.

He was injured in a fall from a window on Simchat Torah, and died almost a year later on Tisha B'av from injuries relating to this fall.

Fasting in Jewish Tradition



<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fasting#Judaism>

Fasting for Jews means completely abstaining from food and drink, including water. Traditionally observant Jews fast six days of the year. With the exception of Yom Kippur, fasting is never permitted on [Shabbat](#), for the commandment of keeping Shabbat is biblically ordained and overrides the later rabbinically instituted fast days. (The fast of the 10th of Teveth would also override the Sabbath, but the current calendar system prevents this from ever occurring.)

[Yom Kippur](#) is considered to be the most important day of the Jewish year and fasting as a means of repentance is expected of every Jewish man or woman above the age of [bar mitzvah](#) and [bat mitzvah](#) respectively. It is so important to fast on this day, that only those who would be put in mortal danger by fasting are exempt, such as the ill or frail (endangering a life is against a core principle of Judaism). Those that do eat on this day are encouraged to eat as little as possible at a time and to avoid a full meal. For some, fasting on Yom Kippur is considered more important than the prayers of this holy day. If one fasts, even if one is at home in bed, one is considered as having participated in the full religious service.

The second major day of fasting is [Tisha B'Av](#), the day approximately 2500 years ago on which the [Babylonians destroyed the first Holy Temple in Jerusalem](#), as well as on which the [Romans destroyed the second Holy Temple in Jerusalem](#) about 2000 years ago, and later after the [Bar Kokhba revolt](#) when the Jews were banished from Jerusalem, the day of Tisha B'Av was the one allowed exception. Tisha B'Av ends a three-week mourning period beginning with the fast of the [17th of Tammuz](#). This is also the day when observant Jews remember the many tragedies which have befallen the Jewish people, including the [Holocaust](#). The atmosphere of this fast is serious and deeply sad (in contrast to [Yom Kippur](#) which is a day of atonement).

[Tisha B'Av](#) and [Yom Kippur](#) are the major fasts and are observed from sunset to the following day's dusk. The remaining four fasts are considered minor and fasting is only observed from sunrise to dusk. Both men and women are expected to observe them, but a rabbi may give a dispensation if the fast represents too much of a hardship to a sick or weak person, or pregnant or nursing woman.

The four other public but minor fast days are:

- The [Fast of Gedaliah](#) on the day after [Rosh Hashana](#)
- The Fast of the [10th of Tevet](#)
- The Fast of the [17th of Tammuz](#)
- The [Fast of Esther](#), which takes place immediately before [Purim](#)

There are other minor fast days, but these are not universally observed, and they include:

- "Bahab," (literally an acronym for "Monday, Thursday, Monday") the first two Mondays and first Thursday of the months [Marcheshvan](#) and [Iyar](#) (postponed by a week if Monday is the first of the month)
- "Yom Kippur Katan," (literally "Little Yom Kippur") the day before every [Rosh Chodesh](#), moved back to Thursday if that day is Saturday
- The [Fast of the Firstborn](#), on the day before [Passover](#), which applies only to first-born sons; this obligation is usually avoided by participating in a [siyum](#) and [ritual meal](#) that takes precedence over fasting.

It is an [Ashkenazic](#) tradition for a bride and groom to fast on their wedding day before the ceremony as the day represents a personal Yom Kippur. In some congregations, repentance

prayers that are said on Yom Kippur service are included by the bride and groom in their private prayers before the wedding ceremony.

Aside from these official days of fasting, Jews may take upon themselves personal or communal fasts, often to seek repentance in the face of tragedy or some impending calamity. For example, a fast is sometimes observed if a [sefer torah](#) is dropped. The length of the fast varies, and some Jews will reduce the length of the fast through [tzedakah](#), or charitable acts. Mondays and Thursdays are considered especially auspicious days for fasting. Traditionally, one also fasted upon awakening from an unexpected bad dream although this tradition is rarely kept nowadays. In the time of the Talmud, drought seems to have been a particularly frequent inspiration for fasts. In modern times as well the [Israeli Chief Rabbinate](#) has occasionally declared fasts in periods of drought.

Judaism views three essential potential purposes of fasting, and a combination of some or all of these could apply to any given fast. One purpose in fasting is the achievement of atonement for sins and omissions in divine service. Fasting is not considered the primary means of acquiring atonement; rather, sincere regret for and rectification of a wrongdoing is key (see [Isaiah](#), 58:1–13, which appropriately is read as the [haftarah](#) on [Yom Kippur](#)).

Nevertheless, fasting is conducive to atonement, for it tends to precipitate contrition (see [Joel](#), 2:12–18).

The second purpose in fasting is commemorative mourning. Indeed, most communal fast days that are set permanently in the Jewish calendar fulfil this purpose. These fasts include: [Tisha B'Av](#), [Seventeenth of Tammuz](#), [Tenth of Tevet](#) (all of the three dedicated to mourning the loss of the destroyed [Temple in Jerusalem](#)), and the [Fast of Gedaliah](#). The purpose of a fast of mourning is the demonstration that those fasting are impacted by and distraught over earlier loss. This serves to heighten appreciation of that which was lost. This is in line with [Isaiah](#) (66:10), who indicates that mourning over a loss leads to increased happiness upon return of the loss:

Be glad with [Jerusalem](#), and exult in her, all those who love her; rejoice with her in celebration, all those [who were] mourners over her.

The third purpose in fasting is commemorative gratitude. Since food and drink are corporeal needs, abstinence from them serves to provide a unique opportunity for focus on the spiritual.

The Text: Buber, Martin: Tales of the Hasidim. Schocken Books, New York. 1991. Page 316

Patchwork

A hasid of the rabbi of Lublin once fasted from one sabbath to the next. On Friday afternoon he began to suffer such cruel thirst that he thought he would die. He saw a well, went up to it, and prepared to drink. But instantly he realized that because of the one brief hour he had still to endure, he was about to destroy the work of the entire week. He did not drink and went away from the well. Then he was touched by a feeling of pride for having passed this difficult test. When he became aware of it, he said to himself: "Better I go and drink than let my heart fall prey to pride." He went back to the well, but just as he was going to bend down to draw water, he noticed that his thirst had disappeared. When the sabbath had begun, he entered his teacher's house. "Patchwork!" the rabbi called to him, as he crossed the threshold.

Comprehension Questions

? Why did the Hasid fast from one Sabbath to the next? Who imposed the fast upon him?

? Why did the Hasid suffer such cruel thirst on Friday afternoon?

? Why was the Hasid prepared to drink water before the end of the appointed fast?

? Why did the Hasid refrain from drinking water?

Bonus ? Why did the Hasid go away from the well?

? Why was the Hasid touched by a feeling of pride?

? Why was the Hasid ready to go back to the well to drink water?

Bonus ? Why did the Hasid's thirst disappear when he bent down to drink water?

? Do you think the Hasid drank from the well at the end or not?

? Why did the Hasid enter his teacher's house when Shabbat had begun?

Analysis Question

Bonus ? What did the teacher mean by calling "patchwork" to the Hasid as he crossed the threshold?

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from This Text

! "Life can only be understood backward. Unfortunately it has to be lived forward" (Soren Kierkegard)

Interpretations

By Rabbi Gustavo Surazski

".. así como un patchwork es una unión de retazos, la indecisión del hombre (deseo de ayunar-deseo de beber y romper el ayuno-controlarse-regreso a la fuente debido al orgullo), sugiere una idea similar. Su personalidad es muy volátil, una unión de retazos. Para mí, las palabras del maestro, son una crítica, pero también se podría entender como una descripción. Finalmente, todos somos medio "patchwork." Es mi humilde opinión."
(Rabino Gustavo Surazski)

By Judith Rosenthal

"You know, a patchwork quilt is made of small squares, each one telling a small piece of the quilter's life story. When put together, the whole story is told. I think that's how we live; in our patches. Lucky thing too, because in seriously sad and difficult times, just getting through one small patch at a time makes it possible to go on. (And even the lovely and joyful things in our lives, no matter how we'd like them to last forever, are just small squares of our lives.)

So I think each time the Hasid stops for a moment to think, to consider, to self-evaluate he is creating another patch, and each patch is a part of the quilt that is his life.

Only when the patches are put together do we see, sometimes with amazement, how we managed to live each patch.

And I think the Hasid understands that more quickly than we do. I think he understands that the 'rough patch' is over, and he'd be OK when he is no longer thirsty.

I think what the teacher first and then the Hasid are teaching us is that life is (like) a patchwork quilt. If we live each patch with thoughtfulness, kindness and self-evaluation; if we live the best life that we can, we'll be ok.

And some day, the patches will hook up, and we will have a lovely Patchwork Quilt that is our life." (Judith Rosenthal)

By Gregory Arluck

First, here is the definition of "Patchwork" as found in the Merriam-Webster dictionary.

Something composed of miscellaneous or incongruous parts: hodgepodge

Hence, "patchwork" is often interpreted to mean "incongruous" or "hodgepodge". You are not complementing something if you describe it as a hodgepodge of this and that.

Second, I believe that the Hasid is pleased, or satisfied with himself. He upheld his fast. This is his mindset as he sets off to see the rabbi.

I do not know why he went to see the Rebbe. However, if it was common for followers to discuss one's problems with the Rebbe, then it is reasonable to assume that, the Hasid would bring up his fast. When the rabbi exclaims "Patchwork!" upon seeing his congregant, I infer that, the rabbi was aware of the Hasid's internal arguments as to whether to drink the water or not. The Hasid did demonstrate incongruous, or hodgepodge like behavior.

Trabajo de remiendos

Un jasid del rabí de Lublín ayunó una vez desde un shabat hasta el siguiente. El viernes por la tarde empezó a sufrir tanta sed, que creyó morir. Vio un pozo, se inclinó sobre él y se dispuso a beber. Pero al instante comprendió que, debiendo soportar todavía solamente una breve hora, estaba a punto de destruir la obra de toda una semana. De modo que no bebió y se apartó del pozo. Entonces se sintió orgulloso de haber superado esa difícil prueba. Cuando adquirió conciencia de ello, se dijo a sí mismo: "Más me vale beber que dejar que mi corazón sea presa del orgullo." Volvió al pozo, pero cuando estaba por inclinarse para sacar agua, advirtió que su sed había desaparecido. Comenzado el shabat, entró en casa de su maestro. "¡Trabajo de remiendos!", le dijo el rabí al verlo cruzar el umbral.