

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Where Are You?

(Unwrapping a Hasidic Story)

Buber, Martin: Tales of the Hasidim. The Early Masters. Schocken Books. New York. 1947. Page 268. Buber, Martin: The Way of Man According to the Teachings of Hasidism. Vincent Stuart LTD. London. 1963

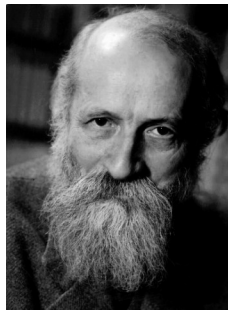


Background to Our Story

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 was a direct descendent of the prominent 16th century rabbi, Meir Katzenellenbogen, known as the Maharam of Padua, as was his cousin, cosmetics queen Helena Rubinstein. Karl Marx is another notable relative.

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.

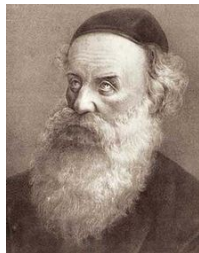
In 1906, Buber published *Die Geschichten des Rabbi Nachman*, a collection of the tales of the Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, a renowned Hasidic *rebbe*, as interpreted and retold in a Neo-Hasidic fashion by Buber. Two years later, Buber published *Die Legende des Baalschem* (stories of the Baal Shem Tov),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

Shneur Zalman of Liady



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shneur_Zalman_of_Liadi



Shneur Zalman of Liady (Hebrew: שניאור זלמן מליאדי) (September 4, 1745 – December 15, 1812) was an Orthodox Rabbi, and the founder and first Rebbe of Chabad, a branch of Hasidic Judaism, then based in Liady, Imperial Russia. He was the author of many works, and is best known for *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, *Tanya* and his *Siddur Torah Or* compiled according to the *Nusach Ari*.

He is also known as the "Baal HaTanya" (Master of the Tanya), and by a variety of other names including "Shneur Zalman Baruchovitch," Baruchovitch being the Russian patronymic from his father Baruch, by the acronym "RaShaZ" (רש"ז), by the title "Baal HaTanya ve-

haShulchan Aruch" (Master of the Tanya and the Shulchan Aruch), as the "Alter Rebbe" ("Old Rebbe" in Yiddish), "Admor HaZaken" ("Old Rebbe" in Hebrew), "Rabbeinu HaZokein", "Rabbeinu HaGodol", "our great rabbi", the "GRaZ", and "Rav".



In 1797, following the death of the Gaon, leaders of the Vilna community falsely accused the Hasidim of subversive activities - on charges of supporting the Ottoman Empire, since Rabbi Shneur Zalman advocated sending charity to support Jews living in the Ottoman territory of Palestine. In 1798 he was arrested on suspicion of treason and brought to St. Petersburg where he was held in the Petropavlovski fortress for 53 days, at which time he was subjected to an examination by a secret commission. Ultimately he was released by order of Paul I of Russia. The Hebrew day of his acquittal and release, 19 Kislev, 5559 on the Hebrew calendar, is celebrated annually by Chabad Hasidim, who hold a festive meal and make communal pledges to learn the whole of the Talmud; this practice is known as "*Chalukas Ha'Shas*".

Genesis Chapter 3:1-24

¹ Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" ² The woman replied to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the other trees of the garden. ³ It is only about fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said: 'You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die.'" ⁴ And the serpent said to the woman, "You are not going to die, ⁵ but God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad." ⁶ When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths.

⁸ They heard the sound of the Lord God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day; and the man and his wife hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ The Lord God called out to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ He replied, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." ¹¹ Then He asked, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?" ¹² The man said, "The woman You put at my side — she gave me of the tree, and I ate." ¹³ And the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done!" The woman replied, "The serpent duped me, and I ate." ¹⁴ Then the Lord God said to the serpent,

"Because you did this,
More cursed shall you be
Than all cattle
And all the wild beasts:
On your belly shall you crawl
And dirt shall you eat

All the days of your life.

¹⁵ I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your offspring and hers;
They shall strike at your head,
And you shall strike at their heel."

¹⁶ And to the woman He said,

"I will make most severe
Your pangs in childbearing;
In pain shall you bear children.
Yet your urge shall be for your husband,
And he shall rule over you."

¹⁷ To Adam He said, "Because you did as your wife said and ate of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,'

Cursed be the ground because of you;
By toil shall you eat of it
All the days of your life:

¹⁸ Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you.
But your food shall be the grasses of the field;

¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow
Shall you get bread to eat,
Until you return to the ground —
For from it you were taken.
For dust you are,
And to dust you shall return."

²⁰ The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. ²¹ And the Lord God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

²² And the Lord God said, "Now that the man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad, what if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever!" ²³ So the Lord God banished him from the garden of Eden, to till the soil from which he was taken. ²⁴ He drove the man out, and stationed east of the garden of Eden the cherubim and the fiery ever-turning sword, to guard the way to the tree of life.



Reading the Story.

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Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the rabbi of Northern White Russia (died 1813), was put in jail in Petersburg, because the mitnagdim (those who opposed Hasidism) had denounced his principles and his way of living to the government. He was awaiting trial when the chief of the gendarmes entered

his cell. The majestic and quiet face of the rabbi, who was so deep in meditation that he did not at first notice his visitor, suggested to the chief, a thoughtful person, what manner of man he had before him.

He began to converse with his prisoner and brought up a number of questions which had occurred to him in reading the Scriptures. Finally, he asked: How are we to understand that God, the all-knowing, said to Adam: "Where are you?"

Do you believe: answered the rabbi, that the Scriptures are eternal and that every era, every generation and every man is included in them?

I believe this: said the other.

Well then, said the zaddik (the leader of a Hassidic group), in every era, God calls to every man: Where are you in your world? So many years and days of those allotted to you have passed, and how far have you gotten in your world?

God says something like this: You have lived forty-six years. How far along are you?

When the chief of the gendarmes. heard his age mentioned, he pulled himself together, laid his hand on the rabbi's shoulder, and cried: "Bravo!" But his heart trembled.



What additional layer of interpretation is Buber's story adding to the Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden's biblical narrative?



"Where are you?" - A question as old as the world.