

From the Rabbi's Desk
Rabbi Manes Kogan

Hillcrest Jewish Center
183-02 Union Turnpike, Flushing, NY 11366
718-380-4145
rabbikogan@hillcrestjc.org

**Why Were You Not Zusia?
(Unwrapping a Hasidic Story)**

Buber, Martin: Tales of the Hasidim. The Early Masters. Schocken Books.
New York. 1947. Page 251.

<http://rabbishimon.com/tzadikim/showz.php?p=zusha.htm>



Background to Our Story

Martin Buber



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

Martin Buber (Hebrew: מרטין בובר, German: *Martin Buber*, Yiddish: מאָרטין בּוּבֶר; 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.

Zusha of Hanipol



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

Rabbi Meshulam Zusha of Hanipol or Meshulum Zusil of Anipoli (1718–1800), Reb Zusha, Reb Zushe, The Rebbe Reb Zusha (sometimes spelled Zusil, Zoussia, Zušya, Zushya, Zushia, Zisha of Anipoli) was an Orthodox rabbi and an early Hasidic luminary and well-known tzaddik. He was one of the great Hassidic Rebbes of the third generation and member of the academy circle of the Maggid of Mezeritch.

Rabbi Zusha was the brother of Rebbe [Elimelech of Lizhensk](#); Rabbi Elimelech was the elder by about 5 years. Both of them were born in the city of [Tykocin \(Podlaskie\)](#), to Reb Eliezer Lipa(e), who was the son of the great Torah scholar Rabbi Elimelech (whom Rebbe Elimelech was named after). Rabbi Meshulam Zusha was named after his mother's father, also a great Torah scholar.

Both Rabbi Zusha of Hanipol and Rabbi [Elimelech of Lizhensk](#) became prominent disciples of the holy [Maggid of Mezeritch](#), part of his inner circle of students, known as the Chevraya Kadisha ("Holy Brotherhood"), together with other great tzaddikim such as Rabbi [Nachum of Czernobyl](#), Rabbi [Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev](#), Rabbi [Aharon \(HaGadol\) of Karlin](#), [Rabbi Shmuel \(Shmelke\) of Nikolsburg](#), Rabbi [Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk](#), and Rabbi [Shneur Zalman of Liadi](#).

Rabbi Zusha was known for his deep emotional approach towards prayer and his great piety.

He was one of the two rabbis, together with Reb Leib HaKohen, with whom Rabbi [Shneur Zalman of Liadi](#) consulted with before printing the [Tanya](#) in 1797. Both gave their approval.

Rabbi Zusha did not write any books, but his teachings were collected in the *Menorat Zahav*, based on the memories of his students.

His [Yahrtzeit](#) is on 2 [Shevat](#). He was buried beside his master and teacher, the [Maggid of Mezeritch](#), in Hanipol. He was succeeded by his son Rabbi Tzvi Menachem Mendel.

The Text:

- <http://rabbishimon.com/tzadikim/showz.php?p=zusha.htm>
- **Buber, Martin: Tales of the Hasidim. The Early Masters. Schocken Books. New York. 1947. Page 251.**

www.rabbishimon.com's Version

Reb Zusha was laying on his deathbed surrounded by his disciples. He was crying and no one could comfort him. One student asked his Rebbe, "Why do you cry? You were almost as wise as Moses and as kind as Abraham."

Reb Zusha answered, "When I pass from this world and appear before the Heavenly Tribunal, they won't ask me, 'Zusha, why weren't you as wise as Moses or as kind as Abraham,' rather, they will ask me, 'Zusha, why weren't you Zusha?' Why didn't I fulfill my potential, why didn't I follow the path that could have been mine?"

Buber's Version

Before his death, Rabbi Zusya said: "In the world to come they will not ask me: 'Why were you not Moses?' They will ask me: 'Why were you not Zusya?'"

Comprehension Questions

? How do the disciples try to comfort Reb Zusha? **?** Why didn't it work?

Bonus ? Despite Reb Zusha's profound regret, what can we say was his greatest gift, one he can present to the heavenly tribunal?

? Below is a slightly different version of our story. What is missing in this version?
What is this version adding?

Rabbi Baer of Radoshitz. once said to his teacher, the 'Seer' of Lublin: 'Show me one general way to the service of God.'
The zaddik replied: 'It is impossible to tell men what way they should take. For one way to serve God is through learning, another through prayer, another through fasting. and still another through eating. Everyone should carefully observe what way his heart draws him to, and then choose this way with all his strength.'

Buber, Martin: The Way of Man According to the Teachings of Hasidism. Vincent Stuart LTD. London. 1963. Page 15.

Bonus ? Below is probably the most famous saying (almost a tongue twister) by the Kotzker Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Morgenstern. How does his saying relate to Zusha's story?

אם אני הוא אני מפני שאני הוא אני ואתה הוא אתה מפני שאתה הוא אתה אז אני
הוא אני ואתה הוא אתה אבל אם אני הוא אני מפני שאתה הוא אתה ואתה הוא
אתה מפני שאני הוא אני אז אני לא אני ואתה לא אתה.

Someone once told Rabbi Mendel that a certain person was greater than another whom he also mentioned by name. Rabbi Mendel replied: "If I am I because I am I, and you are you because you are you, then I am I, and you are you. But if I am I because you are you, and you are you because I am I, then I am not I, and you are not you."

Buber, Martin: Tales of the Hasidim. The Late Masters. Schocken Books. New York. 1948. Page 283.

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

Your call in life: fulfilling the task for which you were brought into this world; a task nobody but you can fulfill.

EPILOGUE

Reb Zusha is about to die and he realizes that he did not fulfill the task for which he was brought into this world: to be Zusha. From the fact that a big tzadik like Zusha of Hanipol considers he fell short of the expectations, we can realize the enormity and complexity of the task. To try to imitate Moses or Abraham is less difficult than

being yourself, since first of all you need to answer the questions: "Who Am I?"
"Where am I?"

The biggest gift of Zusha of Hanipol are his last words: "Why Were You Not Zusia?" Although the answer to the above question is one that entails a whole life journey, Reb Zusha is bequeathing us the most vital information to start addressing them: imitation won't do it. Your path is yours and yours alone. Search for it, and follow it!

In Buber's Words:

Every person born into this world represents something new, something that never existed before, something original and unique. 'It is the duty of every person in Israel to know and consider that he is unique in the world in his particular character and that there has never been anyone like him in the world, for if there had been someone like him, there would have been no need for him to be in the world. Every single man is a new thing in the world, and is called upon to fulfil his particularity in this world. For verily: that this is not done, is the reason why the coming of the Messiah is delayed.' Every man's foremost task is the actualization of his unique, unprecedented and never recurring potentialities, and not the repetition of something that another, and be it even the greatest, has already achieved (Buber, Martin: The Way of Man According to the Teachings of Hasidism. Vincent Stuart. London. 1963. Page 16.)

Following the same path, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Morgenstern -the Kotzker Rebbe- reminds us that if I am I because you are you, i.e., because I try to imitate you, and you are you because I am I, i.e., because you try to imitate me, then neither of us is himself and we don't get to fulfill our unique call in life.

Before the Law

by Franz Kafka

Translation by Ian Johnston

Before the law sits a gatekeeper. To this gatekeeper comes a man from the country who asks to gain entry into the law. But the gatekeeper says that he cannot grant him entry at the moment. The man thinks about it and then asks if he will be allowed to come in later on. "It is possible," says the gatekeeper, "but not now." At the moment the gate to the law stands open, as always, and the gatekeeper walks to the side, so the man bends over in order to see through the gate into the inside. When the gatekeeper notices that, he laughs and says: "If it tempts you so much, try it in spite of my prohibition. But take note: I am powerful. And I am only the most lowly gatekeeper. But from room to room stand gatekeepers, each more powerful than the other. I can't endure even one glimpse of the third." The man from the country has not expected such difficulties: the law should always be accessible for everyone, he thinks, but as he now looks more closely at the gatekeeper in his fur coat, at his large pointed nose and his long, thin, black Tartar's beard, he decides that it would be better to wait until he gets permission to go inside. The gatekeeper gives him a stool and allows him to sit down at the side in front of the gate. There he sits for days and years. He makes many attempts to be let in, and he wears the gatekeeper out with his requests. The gatekeeper often interrogates him briefly, questioning him about his homeland and many other things, but they are indifferent questions, the kind great men put, and at the end he always tells him once more that he cannot let him inside yet. The man, who has equipped himself with many things for his journey, spends everything, no matter how valuable, to win over the gatekeeper. The latter takes it all but, as he does so, says, "I am taking this only so that you do not think you have failed to do anything." During the many years the man observes the gatekeeper almost continuously. He forgets the other gatekeepers, and this one seems to him the only obstacle for entry into the law. He curses the unlucky circumstance, in the first years thoughtlessly and out loud, later, as he grows old, he still mumbles to himself. He becomes childish and, since in the long years studying the gatekeeper he has come to know the fleas in his fur collar, he even asks the fleas to help him persuade the gatekeeper. Finally, his eyesight grows weak, and he does not know whether things are really darker around him or

whether his eyes are merely deceiving him. But he recognizes now in the darkness an illumination which breaks inextinguishably out of the gateway to the law. Now he no longer has much time to live. Before his death he gathers in his head all his experiences of the entire time up into one question which he has not yet put to the gatekeeper. He waves to him, since he can no longer lift up his stiffening body.

The gatekeeper has to bend way down to him, for the great difference has changed things to the disadvantage of the man. "What do you still want to know, then?" asks the gatekeeper. "You are insatiable." "Everyone strives after the law," says the man, "so how is that in these many years no one except me has requested entry?" The gatekeeper sees that the man is already dying and, in order to reach his diminishing sense of hearing, he shouts at him, "Here no one else can gain entry, since this entrance was assigned only to you. I'm going now to close it.

להיות זושא

סמוך לפטירתו אמר רבי זושא מאניפולי:

"בעולם הבא לא ישאלוני: 'מדוע לא היית משה רבנו?'

אלא ישאלו – 'מדוע לא היית זושא?'"

מה שואלים את האדם לאחר מותו? תשובתו של ר' זושא מאניפולי עוסקת בשאלה זו ולמעשה בשאלה כללית הקשורה בתכלית חייו של אדם. אמירה זו עוסקת בכך שכל חיקוי אינו טוב, אפילו חיקוי של צדיק גמור כמו משה רבנו. על האדם לשאול את עצמו אם מעשיו משקפים את אישיותו המיוחדת ותפקידה בעולם. לכל אדם תפקיד שונה, ובשל כך גם הציפיות מאדם אחד שונות לגמרי מהציפיות מאדם אחר. בשל כך, השאלה הנכונה אינה מהם הישגיו של האדם, אלא כיצד מילא את התפקיד שיועד לו בחייו. אמירה נודעת זו של ר' זושא פורסמה על ידי מרטין בובר בספרו "אור הגנוז" ובסדרת ההרצאות שנתן ברדיו, שכונסו לבסוף לחוברת "דרכו של אדם על-פי תורת החסידות" (מוסד ביאליק תשי"ז).

<http://www.zusha.org.il/story/להיות-זושא/>