

# Tales of the Hasidim

## *Rabbi Aaron of Karlin*

They asked Rabbi Aaron what he had learned from his teacher, the Great Maggid. “Nothing at all,” he said. And when they pressed him to explain what he meant by that, he added: “The Nothing-At-All is what I learned. I learned the meaning of nothingness. I learned that I am nothing at all, and that I Am, notwithstanding.” [1:198]

## *Rabbi Zusya of Hanipol*

Before his death, Rabbi Zusya said, “In the coming world, if they shall ask me ‘Why were you not Moses,’ I shall have an answer. But if they ask me, ‘Why were you not Zusya?’ I will be left with no reply.” [1:251]

## *Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Ladi*

The rav once asked his son: “What do you pray with?” The son understood the meaning of the question, namely on what he based his prayer. He answered: “With the verse ‘Every stature shall prostrate itself before thee.’” Then he asked his father: “And with what do you pray?” He said: “With the floor and with the bench.” [1:269]

A man once asked the rav in jest: “Will the Messiah be a Hasid or a mitnaged?” He answered: I think a mitnaged, for if he were a hasid, the mitnagdim would not believe in him; but the Hasidim will believe in him, no matter what he is.” [1:270]

## *Rabbi Israel of Koznitz*

A rich man once came to the maggid of Koznitz. “What are you in the habit of eating?” the maggid asked. “I am modest in my demands,” the rich man replied. “Bread and salt, and a drink of water are all I need.” “What are you thinking of!” the rabbi reproved him. “You must eat roast meat and drink mead, like all rich people.” And he did not let the man go until he had promised him to do as he said. Later the Hasidim asked him the reason for this odd request. “Not until he eats meat,” said the maggid, “will he realize that the poor man needs bread. As long as he himself eats bread, he will think the poor man can live on stones.” [1:292]

The maggid of Koznitz said: “Every day, man must go forth out of Egypt” [1:290]

*Rabbi Jacob Yitzhak ("The Seer") of Lublin*

Once Rabbi Jacob Yitzhak confidently expected salvation to come that very year. When the year was over, he said to his disciple, "the Yehudi": The rank and file of people either have turned completely to God, or can, at any rate, do so. They present no obstacle. It is the superior people who constitute a hindrance. They cannot attain humility, and therefore they cannot achieve the turning ("Teshuvah"). [1:308]

The rabbi of Lublin said: "I love the wicked man who knows he is wicked more than the righteous man who knows he is righteous. But concerning the wicked who consider themselves righteous, it is said: 'They do not turn even on the threshold of Hell.' For they think they are being sent to Hell to redeem the souls of others." [1:315]

*Rabbi Abraham Yaakov of Sadagora*

"You can learn something from everything," the rabbi of Sadagora once said to his hasidim. "Everything can teach us something, and not only everything God has created. What man has made also has something to teach us." – "What can we learn from a train?" one hasid asked dubiously. "That because of one second one can miss everything." – "And from the telegraph?" "That every word is counted and charged." – "And the telephone?" "That what we say here, is heard there." [2:70]

*Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sasov*

The rabbi of Sasov once gave the last money he had in his pocket to a man of ill repute. His disciples threw it up to him. He answered them: "Shall I be more picky than God, who gave it to me?" [2:85]

Rabbi Moshe Leib said: "A human being who has not a single hour for his own every day, is no human being." [2:92]

*Rabbi Simha Bunam of Pzhsba*

Rabbi Bunam said to his hasidim: "He among you who is concerned with nothing but love is a philanderer; he among you who is nothing but devout is a thief; he among you who is nothing but clever is an unbeliever. Only he who has all these gifts together can serve God as he should." [2:250]

Rabbi Bunam once said: "If I were to set out to give learned and subtle interpretations of the Scriptures, I could say a great many things. But a fool says what he knows, while a sage knows what he says." [2:256]

*Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotzk*

Rabbi Mendel said: “I became a hasid because in the town where I lived there was an old man who told stories about zaddikim. He told what he knew, and I heard what I needed.” [2:270]

The rabbi of Kotzk once said of a famous rabbi: “That’s a zaddik in a fur coat.” His disciples asked him what he meant by this. “Well,” he explained, “one man buys himself a fur coat in winter, another buys kindling. What is the difference between them? The first wants to keep only himself warm, the second wants to give warmth to others too.” [2:274]

“Where is the dwelling of God?” This was the question with which the rabbi of Kotzk surprised a number of learned men who happened to be visiting him. They laughed at him: “What a thing to ask! Is not the whole world full of his glory!” Then he answered his own question: “God dwells wherever man lets him in.” [2:277]

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.” [2:283]

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