

Blast from the Past: A Rabbi's Tale

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“An adherent of the Enlightenment, a very learned man, who had heard of the Rabbi of Berdichev, paid a visit to him, too, and to shatter his old-fashioned proofs of the truth of his faith. When he entered the Rabbi’s room, he found him walking up and down with a book in his hand, rapt in thought. The Rabbi paid no attention to the new arrival. Suddenly, he stopped, looked at him fleetingly, and said, “But perhaps it is true after all.” The scholar tried in vain to collect himself – his knees trembled, so terrible was the Rabbi to behold and so terrible his simple utterance to hear. But Rabbi Levi Yitschak now turned to face him and spoke quite calmly: “My son, the great scholars of the Torah with whom you have argued wasted their words on you; as you departed, you laughed at them. They were unable to lay God and His Kingdom on the table before you, and neither can I. But, think, my son, perhaps it is true.” The exponent of the Enlightenment opposed him with all his strength; but this terrible “perhaps” that echoed back at him time after time broke his resistance.”

The story, re-told by Martin Buber, can be found in the first chapter of the book “Introduction to Christianity” published in 1968 by then Professor Joseph Raztinger. “Perhaps it is true.” The word “perhaps” haunts today as it did the poor scholar in the Rabbi’s study.

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