

# ***MOSHE OF KOBRYN***

## **An Answer**

The rabbi of Kobryn liked to tell the story of the answer General Gowin gave to Czar Nicholas. The general was very old and had served fifty years. At maneuvers which the Czar attended the general headed one of the armies. Nicholas rode down the first row and addressed the general: "Well, Gowin, I see you are up and doing. Is your blood still hot?"

Said Gowin: "Not my blood, your majesty. The service is still hot in me."

## **Books**

Once he said: "If it were within my power, I should hide everything written by the zaddikim. For when a man has too much knowledge, his wisdom is apt to be greater than his deeds."

## **The End of the Matter**

The rabbi of Kobryn taught: "At the close of Ecclesiastes we read: 'The end of the matter, all having been heard: fear God!' Now whatever matter you come to the end of, you will always hear this one maxim, 'Fear God!' and this one is the whole. There is not a single thing in all the world that does not show you a way to fear God and to serve Him. All is commandment."

## **Simply to Act**

Before drawing water for the baking of the unleavened bread, the rabbi of Kobryn said to those standing around him: "The king teaches his men all manner of military thrusts and feints, but when they are in the thick of the fight, they throw all they have learned overboard and simply shoot. In respect to the drawing of water there are also many mysteries to be learned, but when it comes to the action itself all I know is what I am bidden to do."

### **Do not Crowd**

Once on a Hanukkah evening the people crowded around to see the rabbi of Kobryn light the candles. But he said: "It is written: 'The people saw, they tottered, they stood afar off.' When you jostle and crowd, you are very far off."

### **Bitter, Not Bad**

The rabbi of Kobryn taught: "When a man suffers, he ought not to say: 'That's bad! That's bad!' Nothing that God imposes on man is bad. But it is all right to say: 'That's bitter!' For among medicines there are some that are made with bitter herbs."

### **Satan's Ruse**

"In olden times," so said the rabbi of Kobryn, "when Satan wanted to prevent a hasid from going to the zaddik, he assumed the shape of his father, or his mother, or his wife, and tried his utmost to persuade him to give up his plan. But when he saw that resistance only strengthened the hasid in his faithfulness, he changed his tactics. He made his peace with the man he was dealing with, grew very friendly, and said, all gentleness and docility: 'You have converted me. Just you go to your rabbi, but permit me to join you; just you pray in your own way, and let me pray along with you; just you learn whatever you can, and I shall help you learn.'

"And so the time comes when Satan says: 'Just you sit down in the zaddik's seat, and I shall sit beside you. We two shall stay together!' "

### **True Fear of God**

"Had I the true fear of God," said the rabbi of Kobryn, "I should run through the streets and shout: 'You are sinning against the Torah in which is written: Ye shall be holy.' "

### **The Peg and the Crown**

The rabbi of Kobryn said: “He who is a leader in Israel must not think that the Lord of the world chose him because he is a great man. If the king chose to hang his crown on a wooden peg in the wall, would the peg boast that its beauty drew the king’s gaze to it?”

### **He Called to Them**

On New Year’s Day before the blowing of the ram’s horn, the rabbi of Kobryn used to call out: “Little brothers, do not depend upon me! Every one had better take his own part!”

### **The Fool**

The rabbi of Kobryn was asked: “Why is it that a cantor is always called a fool?”

“You know,” he replied, “that the world of music verges on that of the turning to God. When the cantor sings he is in the world of music and quite close to that other. How can he manage to keep from leaping over into it and giving himself up to the true turning? Is there any foolishness as foolish as that?”

### **Into the Word**

Rabbi Moshe of Kobryn said: “When you utter a word before God, then enter into that word with every one of your limbs.”

One of his listeners asked: “How can a big human being possibly enter into a little word?”

“Anyone who thinks himself bigger than the word,” said the zaddik, “is not the kind of person we are talking about.”

## **Everywhere**

The rabbi of Kobryn taught: “God says to man, as He said to Moses: ‘Put off thy shoes from thy feet’ —put off the habitual which encloses your foot, and you will know that the place on which you are now standing is holy ground. For there is no rung of human life on which we cannot find the holiness of God everywhere and at all times.

## **“If I Knew”**

Rabbi Moshe once said: “If I knew for sure that I had helped a single one of my hasidim to serve God, I should have nothing to worry me.”

Another time he said: “If I knew I had said ‘Amen’ just once in the way it ought to be said, I should have nothing to worry me.”

And on still another occasion he said: “If I knew that after my death it would be said in Heaven that a Jew was coming, I should have nothing to worry me at all.”

## **Most Important**

Soon after the death of Rabbi Moshe, Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk asked one of his disciples: “What was most important to your teacher?”

The disciple thought and then replied: “Whatever he happened to be doing at the moment.”